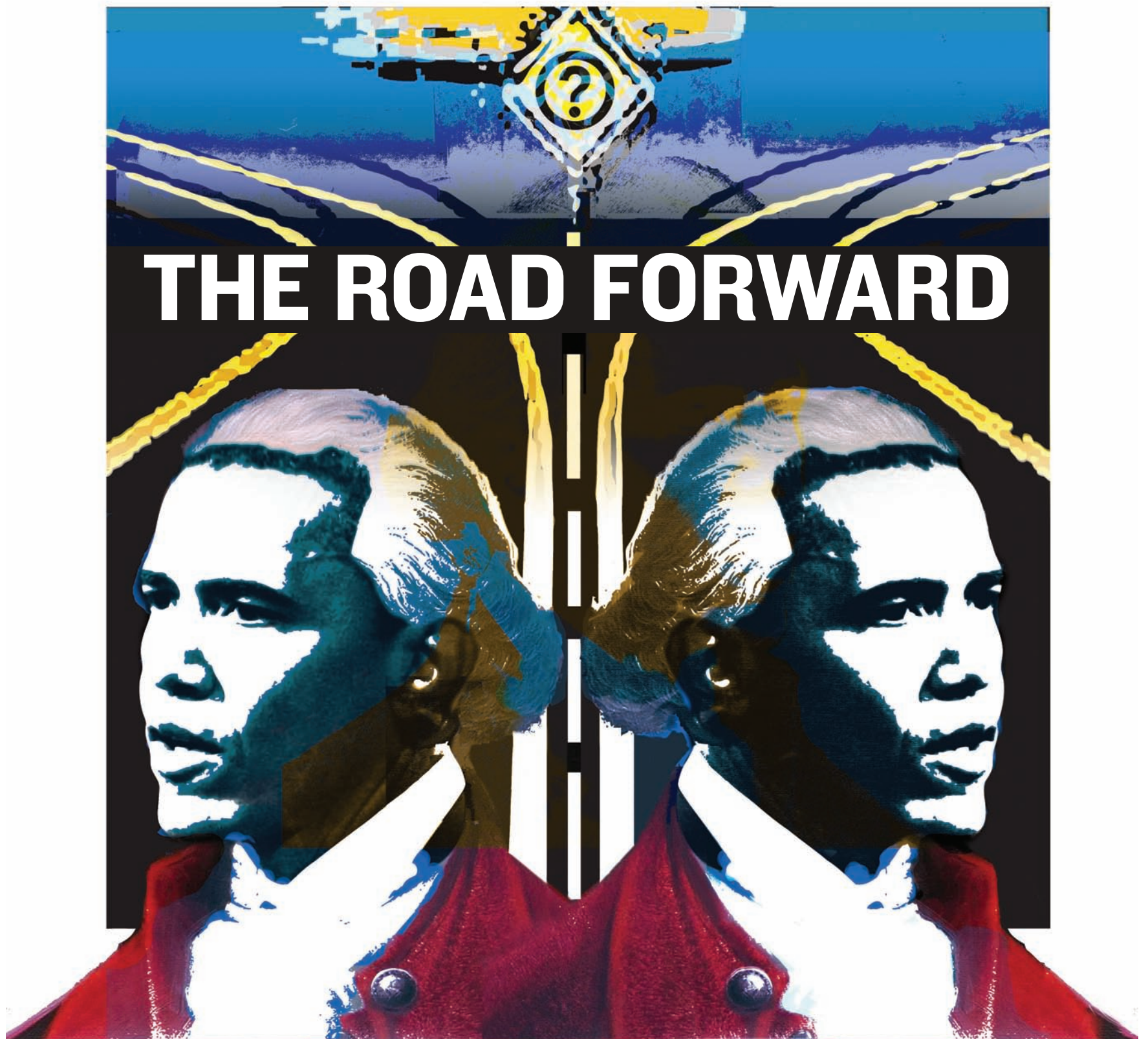


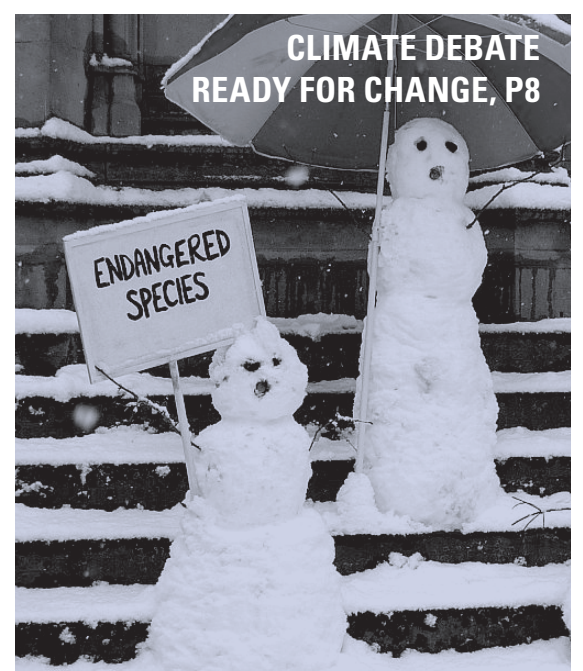
THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #130, JANUARY 16 – FEBRUARY 5, 2009
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



LYNNE FOSTER

SPECIAL PULL-OUT POSTER, PAGE 10



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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays. Since 2000, more than 600 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their time and energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging citizens to produce their own media. *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. Volunteers write and edit articles, take photographs, do design work and illustrations, help distribute papers, update the website and more! *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is the newspaper project of the New York City Independent Media Center, which is affiliated with the global Indymedia movement (indymedia.org), an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production. NYC IMC sponsors three other projects, the children's newspaper *IndyKids*, the IndyVideo news team and the NYC IMC open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org). NYC IMC relies on volunteer participation and is open to anyone who is interested.

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community calendar

PLEASE SEND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

WED JAN 21

4-6 PM • FREE
RALLY: KEEP OUR FAMILIES TOGETHER. Demands for President Obama: Stop the immigration raids, stop the deportations, support a fair, humane and just immigration reform. Federal Building, 26 Federal Plaza (B'way @ Worth St) 718-298-5083 • 718-328-5822

7-10 PM • \$12 adv/\$15 door
FILM/DISCUSSION: "I HAD AN ABORTION." Filmmakers Jennifer Baumgardner and Gillian Aldrich tackle the taboo in a film featuring ten women — including famed feminist Gloria Steinem — who candidly describe experiences spanning seven decades, from the years before *Roe v. Wade* to the present. People Lounge, 163 Allen St (btwn Stanton & Rivington Sts) lisa@paradigmshiftnyc.com • nyaaf.org

SAT JAN 24

2 PM • FREE
ACTION: BIKE LANE LIBERATION RIDE. Time's Up! Bike Clown Brigade clears out the vehicles by issuing "parking tickets" to motorists who endanger cyclists by parking in the bike lanes. Meet at Duarte Square (Corner Canal St & 6th Ave) 212-802-8222 • times-up.org

SUN JAN 25

11AM-12:30PM • FREE
EVENT: CIVIL RIGHTS FESTIVAL W/THE CHILDREN'S SUNDAY ASSEMBLY. Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture 53 Prospect Pk West, Bklyn (btwn 1st & 2nd Sts) • 718-768-2972 bsecdirector@yahoo.com

THU JAN 29

7 PM • \$5 Suggested Donation
FILM/DISCUSSION: "THE TRAIL OF TEARS CHEROKEE LEGACY" with producer Steven Heape and participants at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil (via video conferencing). Film explores President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the forced removal of the Cherokee Nation to Oklahoma in 1838. Bluestockings, 172 Allen St (btwn Rivington and Stanton Sts) 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

7:30 PM • \$3; \$7 for homey supper at 7 PM
FILM/DISCUSSION: "LA OPERACION" ("THE OPERATION"). The documentary exposes the widespread sterilization of Puerto Rican women. Commemorating the 36th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St (btwn Malcolm X & Adam Clayton Powell Blvds) 212-222-0633 • radicalwomen.org

SAT JAN 31

2PM • FREE
MARCH/RALLY: BOYCOTT STELLA d'ORO PRODUCTS. Workers went on strike last August to fight management plan to cut wages by as much as 25 percent and eliminate holidays, vacations, sick pay and extra pay for Saturdays. Come show your support. Stella d'Oro Plant, 237th St @ B'way, Brx. March to Target shopping center, 225th St & Major Deegan vze2jmr@verizon.com stelladorostrike2008.com

THU FEB 5

7:30 PM • Sliding scale \$6+
SLIDESHOW & DISCUSSION: ECO-VILLAGES: WHERE THEY ARE, WHAT THEY'RE DOING, WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT. With more than 400



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FEBRUARY is Black History Month!

photos, this presentation shows how eco-villages worldwide integrate ecological, economic and social/cultural/spiritual sustainability. Brecht Forum, 451 West St (btwn Bank & Bethune Sts) 212 242-4201 • brechtforum.org

SAT FEB 7

7 PM • FREE
BENEFIT/READING: FOR HUMANITARIAN AID IN THE GAZA STRIP. Proceeds go to the International Red Cross; some go to Magen David Adom division for people living in southern Israel. McNally Jackson, 52 Prince St (btwn Lafayette & Mulberry Sts) • 212-274-1160 • mcnallyjackson.com

SUN FEB 8

1 PM • FREE
MEETING: AUTONOMOUS AUTO-DIDACTISMS/THE RADICAL READING CIRCLE. Newly established book club seeks members of the multi-

tude interested in: anti-authoritarianism; Marxism, anarchism, socialism, etc.; critical theory; science, technology and culture; geopolitics, etc.; art, philosophy & life. Shannon Pot Pub, 4506 Davis St, Qns trevorowenjones@gmail.com

FRI FEB 13

7 PM • \$5 suggested
DISCUSSION: CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION. Learn how African American activists played a key role in supporting the Cuban Revolution. A benefit for the Cuban 5. St Mary's Episcopal Church, 521 W 126th St (btwn Old B'way & Amsterdam Ave) 718-601-4751 • freethec_5@yahoo.com

READER COMMENTS

Post your own comment at indypendent.org or email letters@indypendent.org.

EXPLAINING IMMIGRATION

Response to "Wilting Wages: Money Sent Home to Mexico Declines as U.S. Economy Deteriorates," Dec. 12:

Most of the Hispanics who reside in the United States came here because our economic policies made it difficult or impossible for them to make a living in their own countries. Our agribusiness corporations receive massive subsidies that allow them to undercut the prices of peasants all over the world. There is more to it than just subsidies, but that's the explanation that does not require a degree in economics. Those people were starving to death in their own countries due to our policies. The supposed hundreds of millions are not actually sent to Mexico. Most of what we give them is structured so that the money goes directly to a U.S. corporation. The U.S. corporation then takes care of the necessary gratuities.

—GM PIERCE

WAITING FOR OBAMA

Responses to "Obamanomics: Why the Stimulus Plan Will Not Revive the Economy," Dec. 12:

Let's all reserve judgment until we start to see what Obama does. He hasn't even taken office yet and the same people who were yelling so vociferously for his candidacy are now vehemently demanding something other than the platform he ran on. Obama has said that his current strategy about how best to fix the economy is to invest in the U.S. infrastructure and green technology. More investment into such projects means more blue-collar jobs, which means more blue-collar spending and more service jobs to cater to these blue-collar workers.

—ARI

The only thing that has ever combated corporate interests is grassroots work, usually in the form of protest involving mostly women — who have a much larger hand in the progressive shaping of the world at large than is usually portrayed — and not in the "great leader" of history theory to which so many of us tend to subscribe. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was driven by corporate interests just as Obama is. The difference was that in the 1930s there was a vast and vibrant Left, including communists, socialists and anar-

chists for whom, in this day and age, most people (I mean regular working people) show such visceral and uncritical disdain.
—OBAMANOMICS

SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE PRIESTHOOD

Response to "Female Priests Altar the Rules," Dec. 12:

I attended the recent RCWP ordination in Chicago and listened to Bishop Dana Reynolds' homily with interest. Her strong message of reaching out to all the disenfranchised, the poor seemed to be in the best tradition of the Gospels. At Call To Action I attended the session where five women priests told about their ministries. I found it impressive and hopeful. I have over the years worked with women clergy — mostly Episcopal and Lutheran — and found them to be well educated and dedicated. The stubborn refusal of our own hierarchy to even seriously debate the ordination of women and their willingness to deprive the Catholic Christian community of the Eucharist in order to maintain male power seems very contrary to the Lord we serve.

—REV. DCN. ART DONART



TAKE ACTION NOW

Response to "Zeroing in on Obama's Hawks," Dec. 12:

If all of us do nothing but watch, nothing will change. Raise heck over whatever isn't right, never give up and force a change. Too many politicians are owned by big business. Throw them out and start on it now!

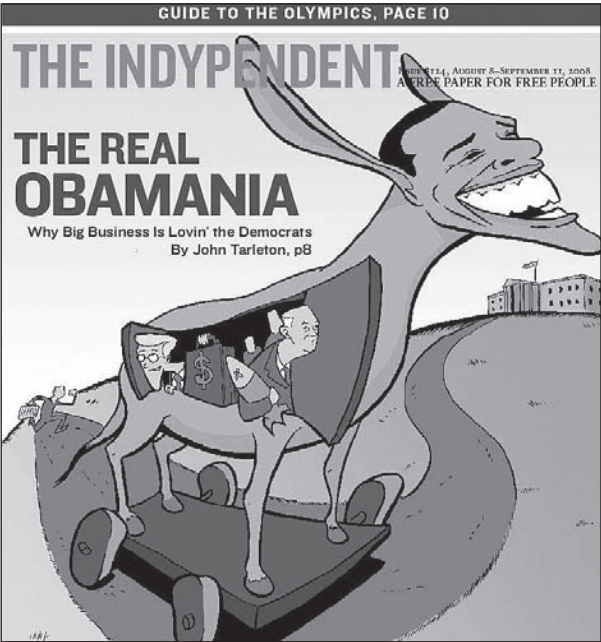
—KEVIN5



WHAT A DIFFERENCE EIGHT YEARS MAKE...

On Jan. 20, 2001, tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered in the freezing rain to protest George W. Bush's takeover of the White House following his theft of the 2000 election and to pelt his motorcade with rotten fruit. This year, millions of people are expected to flock to Washington, D.C., to celebrate the inauguration of Barack Obama. Still, much remains unchanged. Whether the president is a conservative Texas oilman or a brilliant young African-American lawyer from Hawaii, Harvard and the South Side of Chicago, power in this country is still centered in big business and the Pentagon. And our nation's governing philosophy—a fervent belief in free-market economics, global empire and the right to use military force anywhere in the world — remains rooted in decades of bipartisan policymaking. For Obama's presidency to make a decisive break with the failures of the past, Inauguration Day has to be a starting point, not a final destination for the diverse movements that carried him to the White House. Only a ceaseless clamor from visionary, broad-based mass movements will push our new president to take the sort of genuinely progressive positions that can truly solve the multiple crises we face. "We are the ones we have been waiting for," as Obama was fond of telling his supporters during the early part of last year's campaign. Indeed. One group we cannot count on is the corporate media. The media establishment that gave Bush a free pass for much of his presidency will continue to be a powerful force for the status quo no matter who is in the White House. This is why *The Independent* was launched in the waning days of the Clinton administration and why we persisted during the long era that Bush and his wrecking crew of right-wing ideologues have held power. During that time, hundreds of artists, activists and independent media makers have contributed to *The Independent* and made it both a pioneering project in citizens' journalism and a space for bold reporting and analysis that digs beneath the headlines to illuminate the workings of power as well as grassroots efforts to make change. Now, like many on the left, we find ourselves in the novel position of having a president who claims to share many of our concerns. We are hoping for the best, but have no illusions. For our part, we promise to continue being the same fearless, hard-hitting, truth-telling newspaper during a Democratic administration as during a Republican one. Our allegiance continues to be neither to a party nor a politician but to you, our readers, and to bringing forward the voices, concerns and the struggle for justice of the people most affected by policies made in their name.

Obama's presidency has to be a starting point, not a final destination, for the diverse movements that carried him to the White House.



TURNING THE PAGE: Barack Obama campaigns for the White House in George W. Bush's home state of Texas.
PHOTO: flickr.com/an_agent/400339277

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American Dreams

OBAMA HARNESSSES THE SEDUCTIVE APPEAL OF AN ABSTRACT IDEOLOGY

BY CYRIL GHOSH

When Barack Obama assumes the presidency Jan. 20, he will bring a slew of Clinton-era bigwigs in tow: Larry Summers, Eric Holder, Rahm Emanuel, Peter Orszag and the former first lady herself, Hillary Clinton. Perhaps it's not surprising then that many commentators claim Obama has abandoned his hope-and-change platform for a Clintonian restoration. Whether this turns out to be true is an open question, but also of significance is another commonality Obama shares with Clinton. Much of the appeal of both Clinton and Obama lies in the soaring rhetoric of the "American Dream."

Clinton managed to interweave the American Dream's ideals with his personal history in a way that catapulted him to great national popularity. That he was literally born in Hope, Arkansas, only made him more persuasive as an embodiment of the American Dream. In a sense, Barack Obama has surpassed this Clintonian rhetorical strategy. He has successfully amalgamated his political views with his personal history, his name and his biracial identity, thus lending a particularly poignant resonance to his invocations of the American Dream.

Obama is not the only political leader to invoke the Dream. In the last four decades, several political leaders have aggressively done so. Across parties, references to the phrase "American Dream" have dramatically increased since 1965, particularly in presidential inaugurals, state of the union addresses, and party platforms.

Invoking the American Dream has clearly become an important mobilizing strategy for both parties. The Dream serves the purpose of offering a politics of inclusion, one that insists all individuals are inherently equal and, therefore, everyone should have an equal and inalienable right to improve their lives and pursue the kind of happiness they value. This happiness can constitute upward social mobility, but it can also be something else, such as following a particular vocation or living in a particular place. The abstract individualism of the American Dream asserts that it doesn't matter who you are, you can still find happiness.

This agnosticism about identity is supremely important under conditions of extreme heterogeneity. It enables leaders to use the American Dream to appeal across diverse political constituencies without appearing as if they are pandering to sectional interests. In a nation where class, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity form the bases for deeply polarizing conflicts, the abstract individualism of the Dream offers a convenient language of inclusion for all.

Current demographic trends in the United States indicate that the American polity looks more pluralistic now than it has ever before. Liberal immigration laws (characterized by the mass influx of émigrés from the global south since 1965), together with identity politics-based movements (such as feminism and LGBT rights) have made the American electorate

highly pluralistic and divided. In addition, America is projected to become a white-minority country by 2042.

For leaders, it is thus politically expedient to offer an amorphous rhetoric that appeals to everybody instead of singling out particular social groups for political mobilization. In this context, the American Dream presents itself as a convenient rhetorical strategy, and Barack Obama has intelligently adopted this seductive vision.

DOWNSIZING THE DREAM

But this rhetorical strategy is not without problems. As a set of lofty ideals, the American Dream can usefully describe a set of national purposes with the end goal of creating an utopian, meritocratic society in which the individual, regardless of her identity, can work hard, compete with others on a level playing field, and achieve personal success.

Yet, this desire for utopia necessarily leads to frustrated expectations. The American Dream is not unusual in this. Most major tropes in American political culture — such as American civil religion, American exceptionalism, equality of opportunity, level playing field and pursuit of happiness — suffer the same fate. Samuel Huntington usefully captured this tendency

of American politics as inevitably engendering a "politics of disharmony."

Barack Obama has become a messianic figure among American liberals. He symbolically represents racial parity and progressivism. But the truth is that he has promised more than he can possibly deliver and, in all likelihood, he will spend the next four years explaining why he has not been able to significantly improve the lives of ordinary Americans.

This is not his fault. This is an artifact of a constellation of reasons including the nature of American Dream rhetoric, the systemic arrangement of American political institutions including the Madisonian, constitutional system of checks and balances, and the one enduring truth about politics and economics: one individual can never bring about change: aggregates do.

The American Dream has two principal iterations. Unfortunately, in the current political-economic climate, both ring hollow. One version of the Dream talks about a booming middle class, characterized by a suburban single-family home, picket fences, multiple cars in the garage, rising incomes, vacations, abundance, prosperity, beauty, youth and talent. A second iteration of the Dream gestures toward the dream of racial and social justice, toward an America

in which the playing field is genuinely level, and where it doesn't matter who you are, you have opportunities equal to all others. Both versions are disconnected from reality if you look at present employment, wage structures, education, and healthcare.

THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN DREAM

Jennifer Hochschild has called the American Dream an "ideology of success" that is rife with flaws, although with enormous emotional potency. It is precisely for this reason that using American Dream rhetoric in contemporary American political talk makes a certain kind of sense and Obama's use of American Dream talk is indeed good strategy.

But he would be well advised to remember that the original use of the term was very different. According to most genealogies of the phrase, the term was coined in 1931 by popular historian James Truslow Adams. Writing in the middle of the Depression years, Adams cited the American Dream as a catalogue of national values that Americans had become alienated from.

To be sure, the ideals of the American dream can be traced back to the hard work ("Protestant") ethic of Puritan New England and, even further back, to Lockean liberalism itself. In fact, Locke himself used the phrase "pursuit of happiness." Yet, when Adams uses the term, he presents an "American jeremiad" that lamented the existing reality of American society and pointed out its divergence from the values embedded in the intended purpose of the early republic — a set of ideals he called "the American Dream." He describes the "Dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all," where each person will be "able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." This was the original use of the term. It was a lament; it was not a political strategy.

Characterizing himself as the embodiment of the American Dream has so far paid off for Barack Obama. He has done extraordinarily well in what turned out to be a grueling political campaign, particularly in the primaries. While rejecting federal funding, he raised and spent a staggering \$740.6 million, all the while painting himself as an underdog interested in challenging aristocratic, entrenched interests in Washington, D.C. In short, he has cast himself as Jimmy Stewart in Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. But life is not a movie. And, to be fair to him, Obama knows this too — but can't yet let on that he does. Sooner or later he will have to though. And when he does, the nation will have to ritualistically go through the motions with him.

Cyril Ghosh is Adjunct Faculty in International Affairs at New School University. In 2008 he received a Ph.D. in political science from Syracuse University. His dissertation is titled "The Politics of the American Dream: Locke and Puritan Thought Revisited in an Era of Open Immigration and Identity Politics."



CHRISTINE HALE

OBAMA'S CHOICE: PRESIDENT OR KING

By ANN SCHNEIDER

Barack Obama has promised to revise or reverse many Bush administration policies on everything from the environment to workplace safety to reproductive rights. Will he renounce the vast expansion of executive authority that Bush claimed gave the president near monarchical powers over the lives of mere mortals?

Will Obama repudiate Bush's excessive use of signing statements and rather announce that he actually intends to follow laws as passed by Congress? To do so, he'd have to disavow Bush's use of the September 2001 Authorization for Military Force that enabled two wars and the creation of the Guantanamo prison camp.

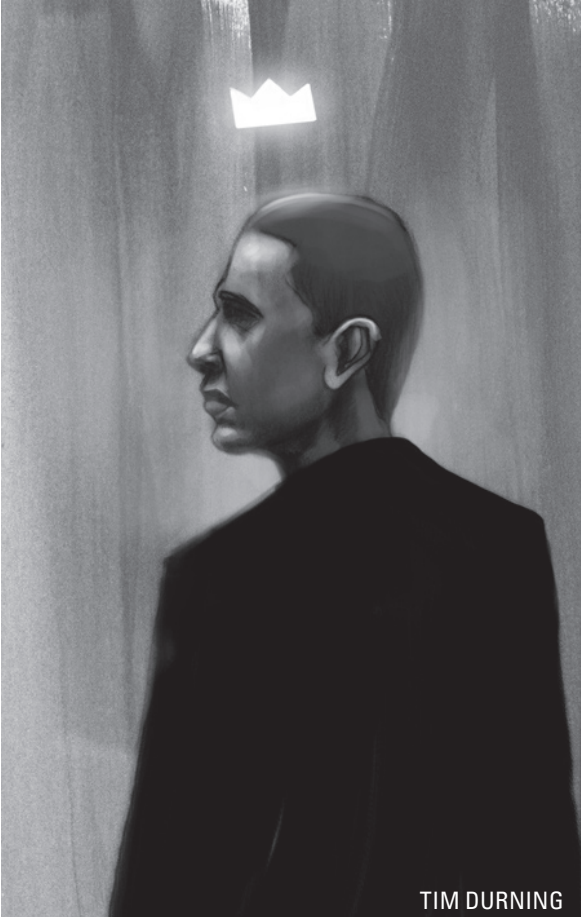
Will he set aside the use of the State Secrets Privilege, which closed the courthouse door to Khaled el-Masri, the German citizen who was "mistakenly" kidnapped by the CIA, rendered to Saudia Arabia and then dumped on a hillside in Afghanistan five months later? If Eric Holder is confirmed as Attorney General, Obama should instruct him to review all of the assertions of "state secrets" made by the Bush administration and reconsider the basis for the assertion. At a minimum, Obama should agree to let the courts see the evidence and decide whether or not the privilege is justified.

Will he direct Holder to withdraw the government's motions to dismiss the privacy suits against the telecommunications companies that were granted immunity by the FISA Amendments Act? Will he stop the bulk applications for warrants for Americans' overseas communications?

Will he restructure the laws used against attorney Lynne Stewart and others that criminalize "material support" — including humanitarian assistance given unknowingly to an organization that has links to terrorists? Current law does not require a showing of intent to support an act of violence. It also allows the president to permanently freeze the money of a charity he suspects has allegiances to terrorists without allowing the accused the right to a factual hearing at any time.

It is a positive step when Obama says he is going to close Guantanamo within a year. But, he abandon the unconstitutional military commissions that continue to deprive detainees of their rights under the Geneva Convention, and that close the doors of federal courts to claims of torture, deprivation of liberty and arbitrary detention?

Some legal experts, including Georgetown University law professor David Cole, say we need a new national security court that would permit preventative detention and allow the use of evidence "tainted"



by torture. It stands the law on its head to let Bush or Obama say that someone can be imprisoned without trial — or that evidence gained through torture should be admissible in court.

The Constitution was originally designed so that Congress would balance the powers of the executive branch. It seems unlikely that Congress will take action given that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) was briefed about the Bush administration's power grabs and did nothing to stop them.

Without Congress investigating the extent of the warrantless NSA spying program — and all the other secret programs that have been leaked to the press over the last eight years — Obama will be free of the political pressure to restore civil liberties.

This lack of pressure is dangerous because it is possible that these expanded executive powers will become the norm for Obama and future presidents. And the failure to hold the Bush administration accountable for its criminal behavior may become a green light for future administrations to engage in their own lawbreaking.

At this point, the only government official at risk of being prosecuted for his role in all these sordid abuses is Thomas Tamm, the mid-level U.S. Department of Justice lawyer who blew the whistle on the Bush administration's domestic spying program by secretly leaking information to the *New York Times*.

Obama must listen to the grassroots activists who heeded his call of hope. Groups including the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the American Library Association and the Liberty Coalition have drawn up a civil liberties roadmap for the new administration. Obama should also keep in mind that eight states and 406 cities and counties — encompassing a total of 85 million people — have passed resolutions calling for the repeal of the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act.

This many Americans cannot be wrong in the demand that civil liberties be restored.

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- Defend labor rights and build economic justice
- Fight for racial and sexual equality, and for immigrant rights

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A Stalled Debate on the Economy

BY ARUN GUPTA

On Feb. 17, if GM reaches a deal with autoworkers to cut costs and bondholders to reduce debt, it will receive \$4 billion more in bailout money. Around the same time, Congress will probably pass the largest civilian economic stimulus since the Great Depression. This will take

place after Congress approves releasing another \$350 billion installment to bail out failing banks. Also in February, incoming President Barack Obama has said he will initiate a “discussion around entitlements” as a central part of cutting government spending.

Taken together, these actions constitute the biggest government intervention into the economy since World War II and may define the legacy of a presidency that’s barely one month old.

Yet, so far, the political process has occurred with minimal public debate. That’s because the various parties — the banks and auto companies, the Federal Reserve, Congress and the Bush and Obama administrations — are loathe to have a debate.

Having a debate means discussing national economic priorities, what precisely is the “free market” and what is its relation to government regulation, oversight and management. Inconvenient questions would arise, such as why has the public been misled about the full cost of bailing out banks and automakers, and why should the public pay for companies’ stock market value many times over but not own them?

Open debate about the economy would mean looking at the contradiction between how the public is being forced to pay out trillions in private profit and private losses while being told they must compete in the market for healthcare, education, housing and food.

Obama’s stimulus plan may employ a few million people and help some particular industries, but it will not address the decline in wages and benefits during the last 35 years, which is the root of the economic crisis. That decline gave rise to debt-driven consumption that ended in the burst housing bubble. And this consumer crisis is matched by a similar crisis within capitalism: excess capacity and stagnating corporate profits, which led to the explosion in debt-financed speculation as a source of new profits.

The domestic automakers are failing because of overcapacity today (and poor busi-

ness decisions from before). *The Wall Street Journal* estimates global overcapacity in the auto industry is as high as 20 million cars — far in excess of domestic U.S. sales of 13 million vehicles in 2008.

The free-market solution would be bankruptcy, allowing the Big Three to collapse and throwing the 240,000 auto workers they employ out of work. But the contagion would infect the entire supply chain: auto-parts suppliers, steel, rubber and glass makers, transportation, maintenance, repair, dealerships and foreign auto “transplants” that depend on the same supply chain.

This would lead to secondary business bankruptcies in Midwestern states where the auto industry is based and severe state and local government budget crises. And it would rob the country of an industrial base that could be manufacturing not just cars but mass transit systems, as well as researching and developing low-carbon fuels and advanced engine technologies.

Thus it makes sense to save domestic automakers, but this means retaining overcapacity — in fixed capital, plants and infrastructure, and labor — for years.

The full cost of salvaging the automakers is put at up to \$125 billion by Mark Zandi, the chief economist of Moody’s economy.com. As of mid-January, GM’s market capitalization was \$2.4 billion and Ford’s was \$5.2 billion. Given privately owned Chrysler is in the worst shape, the market value of the three automakers is well under \$10 billion. The public could then just buy the companies for less than the \$13.4 billion doled out so far, fire the failed management and make the shareholders and bondholders assume most losses. (The market is supposed to be about assuming risks after all.)

Republicans want to pin Detroit’s woes on the United Auto Workers, but their wages and benefits account for less than 10 percent of the sticker price of a domestic automobile, according to the Harbour Report, a leading auto industry study. Forcing down auto workers pay would just exacerbate the decline in consumer demand that underlies the recession.

The real culprits are the Big Three executives who dished out big dividends during profitable times, lost billions on ill-planned acquisitions of foreign auto companies, stuck with gas-guzzling trucks and SUVs and fought greater fuel efficiency standards while gas prices climbed upwards.

It’s not just the automakers that need to be bailed out; the whole industry needs restructuring from part-suppliers to carmakers to car dealers. This means having a clear plan for the nation’s economy.

The first principle should be the public owns what it pays for. Management could be outsourced and autoworkers given seats

on the new boards. Targets could be set for wages and benefits, production levels, fuel efficiency and carbon emissions. The auto industry should be mandated to meet high-mileage standards. To push consumers to buy fuel-efficient hybrids, a floating tax should be placed on oil to keep it above \$100 a barrel.

A significant oil tax would have many other benefits, such as reducing greenhouse gases far more effectively than carbon cap-and-trade schemes in pollution permits (which the Obama administration favors so as to inflate another speculative financial bubble). An oil tax could spur a new alternative fuel and engine technologies, and it would reduce both the U.S. trade deficit and its imported oil habit.

To deal with retired autoworkers’ pensions, Congress should bolster the U.S. Pension Benefits Guaranty Corp., which has an \$11 billion shortfall that would more than double if it had to take over the domestic automakers’ pensions. To deal with retirees’ healthcare costs, universal single-payer healthcare would result in huge savings for businesses and households alike by eliminating almost all profits and administrative and bureaucratic costs.

But it would be a monumental political battle to take on oil companies, the automakers, HMOs and drug companies, their allies in Congress, as well as the neoliberal ideologues with a roost in every corporate media outlet.

Instead, Obama has cast his lot with the super-rich, which is of little surprise given his ties to Wall Street and big corporations. His call to “discuss” entitlements — meaning slash Social Security and Medicare — is an attempt to make working Americans pay yet another time for the economic disaster.

Social Security can meet all its obligations until 2049 and is funded through the payroll tax. Talking about cutting Social Security indicates Obama wants the government to default on the \$2.4 trillion in treasury bonds in the trust fund. Even if there was a need to default on government bonds, the pain should first be inflicted on the wealthy, foreign central banks and bailed-out corporations that hold these bonds. Similarly, any funding problems for Medicare (and Medicaid) could be eliminated clean with a universal single-payer plan.

This is why there is no honest debate. It would place tremendous pressure on wealthy individuals who made trillions of dollars off the speculative bubbles to pay. It would mean admitting that universal healthcare and education is easily achievable, which could lead to demands for housing and food security to be basic rights. This would imperil our pyramid-style economy, where wealth at the top is based on mass theft from below. And that’s the last thing the incoming Obama administration wants to discuss.

Confused?
Upset?
Broke?



Arun Gupta and illustrator Frank Reynoso reveal how the economy spun out of control in their “Economic Crisis Slideshow,” found online at indypendent.org.

Unions Hope For New Era of Organizing

By BENNETT BAUMER

After pouring at least \$300 million into supporting Democratic candidates for the White House and Congress last year, labor unions are hoping that the new president will help enact their number one legislative priority: The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA).

The act would allow workers to become officially unionized when more than half of the employees at a worksite sign union authorization cards. Once recognition is certified, the employer would be required to begin contract negotiations and reach an agreement within 120 days. Otherwise, a government-appointed arbitrator could impose an agreement — a mechanism that already exists in public-sector bargaining.

The EFCA is an attempt to address the near impossibility of unionizing private-sector workers these days.

To create momentum for the act, labor advocates are trying to link it to Obama’s proposed stimulus package. They contend EFCA could give a significant boost to the national economy by lining workers’ pockets with higher wages and by providing greater job security.

Unionized blue-collar workers earn on average \$18.88 per hour while their non-union counterparts garner \$12.95 on average, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unionized service employees earn \$16.22 per hour, almost double non-union service workers.

Many economists say the current economic crisis has its roots in the decades-long decline in wages in the United States, which supports the argument for pushing for higher wages (and better benefits).

Writing in *Monthly Review* December 2008, economists John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff state “that real wages of private nonagricultural workers in the United States (in 1982 dollars) peaked in 1972 at \$8.99 per hour, and by 2006 had fallen to \$8.24 ... despite the enormous growth in productivity and profits over the past few decades.”

Passing the EFCA will be difficult battle, however. “Union supporters are portraying the act as part of the

economic stimulus package,” said labor writer Steve Early. Early thinks Senate support for EFCA is close to the filibuster-proof 60 votes, but prominent Democrats are waffling on support. Labor needs to make it part of the economic package or the act “will run the risk of being pigeonholed” as a payback to a special interest that elected Democrats, Early said.



THE UNION MAKES US STRONG: Organizers with the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles. According to one study, 53 percent of U.S. workers would like to join a union. However, 79 percent believe they could be fired for doing so. PHOTO: leadershipforchange.org

Big business is trying to paint EFCA as the end of the world and spent \$50 million during the 2008 election cycle to defeat pro-EFCA candidates. Critics of EFCA, including 1972 Democratic Party presidential nominee George McGovern, denounce EFCA for allegedly curtailing employee free choice by taking away the secret ballot election.

The 1935 Wagner Act allowed the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to certify unionization efforts

by either secret ballot elections or card checks. In 1947, the pro-business Taft-Hartley Act ended card checks after union membership grew to about 35 percent of the workforce. A little more than 12 percent of the workforce is currently unionized, and only 7.5 of private-sector workers were union members as of the end of 2007.

“EFCA would give unions the option to have federal arbitrators write the terms of a binding contract, setting wages, benefits, hours, work rules, and all other terms of employment if negotiations between the employer and union fail,” wrote Home Depot co-founder Bernard Marcus in *Business Week*. “... I’m also opposed to the dishonesty of some EFCA supporters who claim that worker coercion by employers in union elections is ‘the norm.’”

According to a study published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, about 25 percent of union election campaigns involve illegal firings and “almost one-in-five union organizers or activists can expect to be fired as a result of their activities in a union election campaign.”

Currently, workers seeking to unionize must sign-up at least 30 percent of their coworkers on union authorization cards to participate in a NLRB-supervised elections that often are fraught with employer delays and coercion.

“That period of time before the vote and filing [for the election] with the NLRB is full of captive audience meetings that play to fear,” said Cindy Harrity, Communication Workers of America Local 1298 organizer. Harrity added that, in a recent campaign at a Connecticut cable company, her union filed for an election where more than 70 percent of the workforce signed union authorization cards, but lost by two votes because of employer coercion.

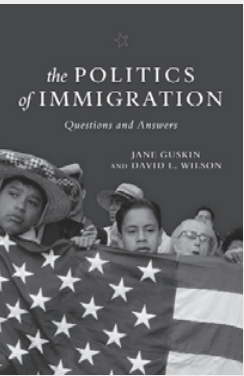
The Human Rights Watch report, “Unfair Advantages,” found that during union authorization elections, employers direct anti-union campaigns that often include compulsory meetings where workers are forced to listen to anti-union rhetoric and are threatened with workplace closings. The report also concluded that the NLRB’s enforcement mechanisms fail to dissuade employers from routinely violating labor laws.

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS

The Politics of Immigration

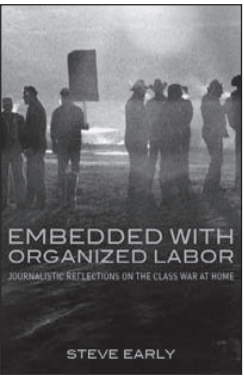
Jane Guskin & David Wilson

“We desperately need to put aside false information about immigrants, to see them as we see ourselves with honesty and compassion. This book gives powerful meaning to the slogan ‘No Human Being is Illegal.’ I hope it will be widely read.”—HOWARD ZINN, author of *A People’s History of the United States*



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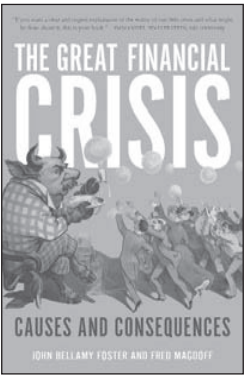
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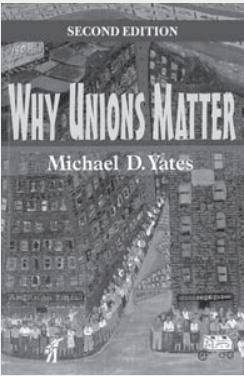
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A Political Climate Change

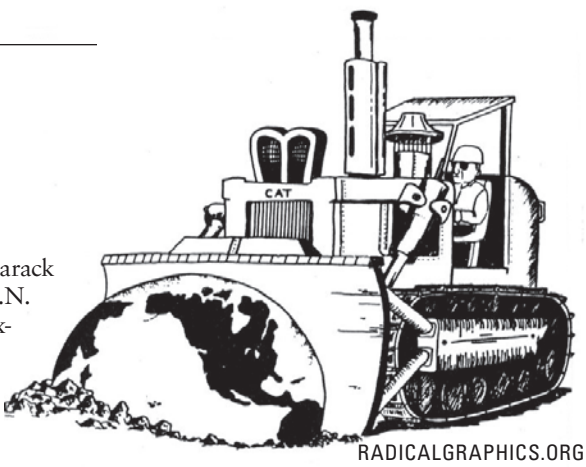
BY BRYAN FARRELL

Future generations will probably regard the Bush administration as the most environmentally destructive presidency in history. But it will not just be for the reasons fresh on our minds today — namely the rollback of many major environmental laws of the last four decades. The Bush years, will also be remembered for its neglect and outright denial of climate realities, crucial time that could have been spent preventing the planet from warming beyond a manageable level.

The failure to address climate change these past eight years has forced

many scientists to call for stricter global emissions targets. If Barack Obama fulfills his proposed pledge to re-engage with the U.N. Convention on Climate Change, he will be entering an extremely contentious debate.

Obama's environmental policies may be leaps and bounds ahead of those of his predecessor, but he will have to play catch-up when it comes to establishing a respectable climate policy. A look at what Obama proposes reveals that the United States is not headed for the type of radical reform necessary to become a climate leader and avert widespread catastrophe.



THE SCIENCE: Renowned NASA climate scientist James Hansen said in 2006 that the world had a **10-year window of opportunity** to act against global warming and prevent catastrophic climate change.

POLICY: While Obama has called to making climate change a top priority, the only 10 year plan he has outlined is to eliminate U.S. dependence on foreign oil — a positive national security measure, but not an action that will combat global warming.



THE SCIENCE: In order to minimize severe climate change, European nations are pushing for a **global treaty that caps carbon dioxide emission levels** at 450 parts per million (ppm). The current level is at 380 ppm. But NASA's Hansen and other notable figures — such as Al Gore — are pushing for the standard to be set at 350 ppm.

POLICY: According to the Australian Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, Britain, Australia and the United States would have to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 5 percent each year over the next decade to hit the target of 450 ppm. Obama's plan to reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050 would fall short, cutting carbon dioxide by an average of only less than 3 percent each year.

THE SCIENCE: Many top climate scientists oppose **caps on carbon dioxide emissions** because they merely slow the rate at which fossil fuels are used — rather than preventing them from being used entirely, which they say is necessary. NASA's Hansen favors a carbon tax with a 100 percent dividend. That way high carbon users are penalized and low carbon users are rewarded.

POLICY: Obama wants to implement a cap-and-trade program to reduce greenhouse emissions. In an open letter to the president-elect sent at the end of December, Hansen wrote, "this approach is ineffectual and not commensurate with the climate threat. It could waste another decade, locking in disastrous consequences for our planet and humanity."

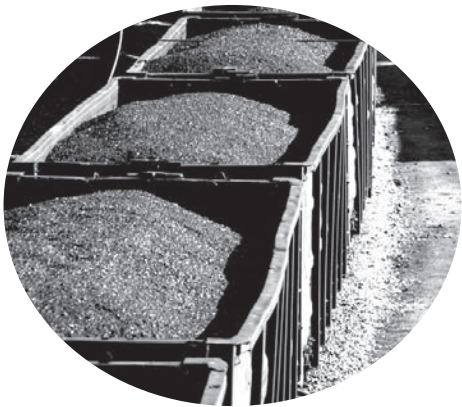
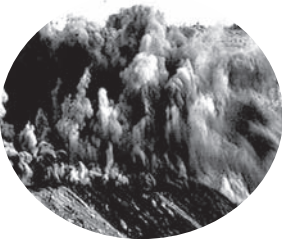
THE SCIENCE: According to water-encyclopedia.com, pollution caused by **off-shore drilling**, production operations and spills or leaks from ships or tankers typically contribute more than 7 percent of the total annual oil waste in oceans.

POLICY: Obama has indicated he would allow off-shore drilling if it was needed as part of a compromise in order to pass a comprehensive energy bill.



THE SCIENCE: provides 23 percent of America's energy, but emits about 40 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas pollution. There are many technological hurdles that must be overcome for carbon dioxide to be removed from coal in a safe, clean and economical manner. The **"clean coal" movement** has been criticized for being a cover to allow the building of new coal-fired power plants with the hope that controversial proposed clean technology can be phased in later.

POLICY: Obama heartily supports the development of "clean coal" technology. Furthermore, he is calling for just 10 percent of electricity to come from clean renewable sources by 2012 and 25 percent by 2050. Meanwhile, Al Gore has called on the U.S. government to "commit to producing 100 percent of our electricity from renewable energy and truly clean carbon-free sources within 10 years."

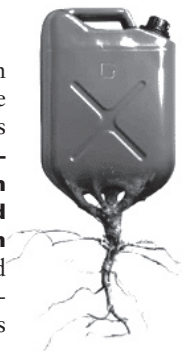


THE SCIENCE: The process of converting **coal to oil** produces nearly twice as much greenhouse gas emissions as the use of conventional oil.

POLICY: Obama co-introduced the Coal-to-Liquid Fuel Promotion Act of 2007, a bill that would help subsidize companies invested in coal-to-oil technologies.

THE SCIENCE: Aside from producing 15 percent more carbon dioxide emissions than conventional oil, **ethanol (fuel produced from plants such as corn and sugar cane) production** intensifies the global food crisis and encourages clearing of heavily forested areas (in large part by burning), such as vast areas of the Amazon rainforest, in order to grow these fuel cash crops. Forests help combat global warming by removing carbon from the atmosphere.

POLICY: Obama is a staunch supporter of biofuels, particularly ethanol — as are many of his cabinet picks. The *Energy Tribune* recently called Obama, Tom Vilsack (Secretary of Agriculture nominee) and Ken Salazar (Secretary of Interior nominee) the "ethanol scammers' dream team." Stephen Chu, the nominee for Secretary of Energy, has called corn-based ethanol a transitional fuel crop.



THE SCIENCE: The process of building enough **nuclear power plants** to meet U.S. energy needs would increase greenhouse emissions dramatically. Not only would large power plants have to be constructed, but the mining, processing and transportation of uranium is energy intensive, as is the energy costs of management of the remaining radioactive waste.

POLICY: Obama favors nuclear as one component of the U.S. energy mix, but is also not ready to move forward with the building of new plants, based on proliferation and waste disposal issues.



THE SCIENCE: Approximately one-third of carbon dioxide emissions are produced by agriculture and land use changes. The **livestock industry** alone is responsible for 18 percent of emissions. Feedlots are highly fossil-fuel dependent, from the fertilizers and pesticides used to grow the grain that feed the animals to the shipment of the grain and ultimately the meat.

POLICY: The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recommended people reduce meat consumption. However, Obama has never touched on the subject of eating less meat and neither has his nomination for Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, who actually expanded feedlots during his tenure as the governor of Iowa. The Organic Consumers Association has described Vilsack as "another skill for Monsanto and corporate agribusiness."



GRASSROOTS FOR THE EARTH

While politicians struggle to address climate change, social and environmental movements are attempting to pick up the slack in dramatic fashion. Leading voices, such as environmental authors Bill McKibben and Wendell Berry, are helping organize a large-scale "civil act of civil disobedience" at a coal-fired power plant near Washington, D.C., March 2 as a wake-up call to the policymakers on Capitol Hill.

In the days leading up to this action, the second national youth summit to solve the climate crisis will take place in the capital. The organizers, who are calling this gathering Power Shift '09, aim to push the Obama administration and Congress to pass "bold, comprehensive, and just national climate legislation before entering international climate negotiations in December 2009."

Such a landmark transition for this country would signal hope for the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen beginning Nov. 30. A global network of climate justice groups already organizing mass nonviolent direct actions for those two weeks has called this conference "the most important summit on climate change ever to have taken place." While previous U.N. climate conferences have provided nothing but "empty rhetoric and a green-washed blueprint for business-as-usual," as a Copenhagen-based climate activist organization explained, this year's is sure to be "one the leaders will never forget."

The past couple years have produced some unforgettable moments as well. Thirty-seven people were arrested in July for chaining themselves to train tracks that lead to the world's largest coal terminal in southern Australia. London's Heathrow Airport was the target of a weeklong protest in August 2007 when an estimated 1,500 people demonstrated against the construction of a new runway and to raise awareness of the high carbon footprint of airline travel. Meanwhile, in the United States, the grassroots campaign Step It Up organized 1,400 demonstrations in April 2007 to demand that Congress cut carbon 80 percent by 2050.

Environmental activists have managed to delay or squash 78 of a proposed 150 new coal-fired plants in the United States within the past four years. Many noteworthy figures have been pushing for direct action against the construction of new coal plants, including former Vice President Al Gore, who told a crowd at the Clinton Global Initiative last September, "we have reached the stage where it is time for civil disobedience to prevent the construction of new coal plants that do not have carbon capture and sequestration." Members of the climate justice organization RisingTide, meanwhile, have carried out several direct actions against proposed coal-fired plant sites. Together with other organizations including Rainforest Action Network, they have led a campaign against large banks that have millions of dollars of investments in the coal industry.

Given the deaf ear policymakers continue turned toward climate experts, direct action will no doubt speak louder than the science.

—B.F.

For more information:
-350.org
-powershift09.org
-ran.org/get_involved
-klimax2009.org
-risingtidenorthamerica.org
-coolcities.us
-climatechallenge.org



Organizing to Win

PEOPLE POWER: Demonstrators march in the streets of New York City during the 2004 Republican National Convention. PHOTO: ANDREWSTERN.NET

By DAVID SOLNIT

Barack Obama’s election seems to have dispelled some of the despair that grew up in the repressive war-making aftermath of September 11 and the subsequent invasion of Iraq and Bush’s re-election. This is good for organizing — people step up out of hope, not despair. Many of us who have a deep critique of Democrats, political parties and politicians, however, are left conflicted or confused. Whether we will see the opening of a space for real positive changes or an era in which movements and resistance get co-opted depends on whether and how we organize — and if we learn key lessons from past global justice (and other) organizing and understand how Obama’s campaign (and the independent efforts for Obama) communicated, organized and inspired.

Here are five lessons that I learned from reflecting on the Seattle World Trade Organization meeting shutdown nine years ago and grassroots campaigns against war and corporate globalization since:

1. UPROOT THE SYSTEM

We cannot afford just to target the symptoms of the system or organize around single issues. Organizing with a holistic framework provides a convergence space where everyone who fights against the system (capitalism, empire, imperialism, neoliberalism, etc.) and its effects on our communities can make common cause. This overarching framework helps globally focused activists to anchor their work in local

struggles against the impact of the global system (like workers’ rights, environmental justice, and anti-privatization fights) and local organizers to reframe their struggles within their global context (anti-corporate globalization), allowing our efforts to be complementary and cumulative rather than competitive or unrelated. It is not easy and goes against many conventions, but it is key to building a hopeful flourishing network of movements that spans the globe.

2. ORGANIZE STRATEGICALLY

Carrying out one-time actions or mobilizations or repeating our favorite or most familiar tactic (marches, conferences, street theater, direct action, educational events, etc.) without ongoing campaigns with clear long-range goals and vision — as well as short-term, winnable interim goals — can lead to burnout and is unlikely to build long-term movements to make change. This is essential as we push Obama to bring our troops home from Iraq, Afghanistan and the rest of the planet and to stand up to corporations and the economic system that underlies so many of the problems we face. With Obama in office, the cutting edge of organizing for change will be to clearly define and publicize very understandable demands. For example, it is not enough to say “end the war,” which Obama also says; we must also outline benchmarks of what ending the war means, such as troop removal before the 16-month deadline he committed to in his campaign, bringing all troops and private contractors home, closing all military bases and stopping the corporate takeover of Iraq’s natural resources.

3. BUILD PEOPLE POWER

People directly asserting their power can win changes and shift underlying power relationships. We have seen this in the 1999 shutdown of World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle and in anti-corporate successes like the Coalition of Imokalee Farm Workers’ recent victory over Burger King or the Water Wars in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where a mobilized citizenry drove out the U.S.-based Bechtel Corporation, which tried to increase water rates by 300 percent. If movements do not articulate our own people-powered strategies to realize change, activists will be demobilized every two or four years as people get drawn into the official channels for change — national elections. We saw this in 2004, when, lacking a viable well-publicized strategy to stop the Iraq War, many people instead worked to defeat Bush. Whatever one’s belief about elections, parties or politicians, most agree

that it is independent movements that force (or support) politicians to make positive changes.

4. EXPERIMENTS IN THE LABORATORY OF RESISTANCE

Nobody knows exactly how to change things. Developing new forms of resistance, communication and organizing is essential. Alternately, when we overuse a model or rhetoric that worked once or fetishize and base our identity on a certain device (like parading giant puppets, street reclaiming parties, black bloc, vigils or Seattle-style shutdowns), not only can our tactics be more easily repressed or co-opted, but the general public can be inoculated against them. Our actions are experiments in a laboratory of resistance. The value of any experiment comes when we analyze and reflect together on what worked and what did not and why. Creating a culture of creativity, reflection and analysis is key.

5. TELL OUR OWN STORIES

The world is made of stories, and our struggles for social change are battles of competing stories. Our actions can be our most powerful storytelling, like the 1994 Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico, the 1999 Seattle shutdown, or the Feb. 15, 2003, global antiwar protest of millions of people around the world. The system fights back by trying to take control of the meaning of our stories and by telling its own stories, like the post-September 11 “War on Terror.” Can we become powerful storytellers and win control of the meaning of our stories? Can we also support and nurture the independent media outlets (like *The Independent*!) that amplify our stories?

David Solnit organized with the Direct Action Network in Seattle in 1999 and currently works with Courage to Resist supporting GI resistance. He edited Globalize Liberation, co-wrote Army of None with Aimee Allison and has co-written/edited with Rebecca Solnit the forthcoming book The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle (AK Press).

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Our country and our world are in crisis, and the tepid, incremental reforms Obama has been emphasizing aren't going to cut it. *It's time to think outside the box.*

HEALTHCARE

PITFALLS: Even with subsidies, many people will be unable to afford healthcare coverage. “Meaningful” coverage is poorly defined and insurance companies would fiercely resist requirements to accept all customers because it would cut into their profits. Obama is trying to reduce costs for the individual without confronting the for-profit model, which is the primary factor in spiraling healthcare costs.

TAKING ACTION: Healthcare Now!, a coalition of dozens of progressive groups with chapters in over 300 cities, is the main force behind H.R. 676, which would establish a universal, single-payer healthcare system. H.R. 676 currently has 90 co-sponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives. For more information, go to healthcare-now.org.

TAKING ACTION: Iraq Veterans Against the War has emerged as the moral center of the anti-war movement. To find out how you can help support them, see ivaw.org. Look for groups like CodePink to raise a ruckus in the spring when Congress prepares to sign off on another \$150 billion or so to finance the two wars for another year (codepink4peace.org).

IMMIGRATION

WHAT WE NEED: Stop workplace raids and mass deportations by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that are terrorizing entire immigrant communities. Guarantee immigrant workers the same rights as citizens. It's the only way to prevent employers from pitting one group of workers against another — to the detriment of all. A guest worker program would create a two-tier labor system. End support for unjust trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that have driven more than a million small farmers off their lands and sent them migrating north. In the face of widespread immigrant bashing, what we may need first is for Obama to lead a national discussion on how immigrants make the United States a more dynamic and prosperous society.

ALL OBAMA, ALL THE TIME

To read more *Independent* coverage about Barack Obama, see independent.org/obama

OBAMA'S PLAN: It appears Obama will propose an economic stimulus package of \$700 to \$800 billion over two years that offers a mix of spending on public works, unemployment insurance and food stamps — as well as tax cuts for individuals and businesses. He has backed away from his pledge to restore top marginal tax rates from 35 to 39 percent. As for the financial industry, Obama vows to impose more stringent regulations. He also wants Congress to hand him the other half of the \$700 billion in bailout money, which he says he will use to help community banks, small businesses, consumers and homeowners, as well as large financial institutions. Obama has dropped strong hints that looming trillion dollar deficits will be paid for by future cuts in Social Security and Medicare.

Only allow futures trading for producers and consumers of commodities, such as farmers that grow grains or airlines that use fuel. To deal with the economic crisis, address the stagnant wages of the last 35 years by raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations, and making the organizing climate easier for unions, all of which will lead to rising incomes.

TAKING ACTION: For grassroots organizing and strategizing around economic issues, go to bailoutmainstreet.com.

OBAMA'S PLAN: He has vowed to create 5 million new jobs by pursuing a "Green Deal," such as by investing \$150 billion in alternative energy in the next 10 years. He has also promised to have 1 million plug-in hybrid cars on the road by 2015 and to have 25 percent of U.S. electricity come from renewable sources by 2025.

Eighty percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas and a wide array of urban sustainability initiatives should be launched from funding more mass transit and bicycling to promoting urban farming and more public green space and reversing sprawl in favor of shifting people into cities, which can be much less resource intensive than suburbs or rural areas. Carbon emissions should be heavily taxed as a step towards combating global warming. Ditch carbon cap-and-trade schemes, which are rife with fraud and may turn into the next speculative bubble as financial firms have already opened up carbon-trading desks in anticipation of the huge profits that can be made.

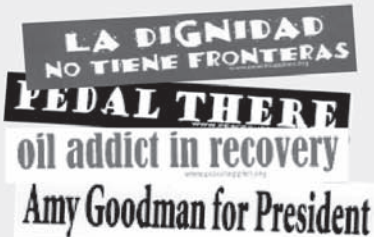
TAKING ACTION: For more on efforts to develop a “Green Deal”, go to apolloalliance.org, bluegreen-alliance.org or greenforall.org. For more radical environmental activism see risingtidenorthamerica.org or earthfirst.org. To learn more about so-called “clean coal,” go to mountainjusticesummer.org.

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Post-Palin Feminism



BRIAN PONTO

BY ABBY SCHER

From the podium at the Christian Right's Values Voter Summit in mid-September, Kate O'Beirne of the National Review Institute pronounced that the "selection of Sarah Palin [as the GOP vice presidential nominee] sounded the death knell of modern American feminism."

"She's a prick to the liberal establishment, to the feminists and to the men who fear them," she jeered.

But as "Palin Power" surged through the halls of the Hilton Washington that day and through the Republican Party base in later weeks, her vice-presidential candidacy revealed a generational cleavage that conservative elders may not have expected. Because even as older conservatives decried anything feminist, many younger activists in the hall were supportive of Sarah Palin's "free-market" feminism.

Sarah Palin is by no means a liberal feminist. She has expressed off-again, on-again support for talking about condoms during sex education, shown ambivalence about benefiting from Title IX, which bans sex discrimination in educational institutions, and is associated with the group Feminists for Life. But Palin gave viable political form to a free-market feminism that until now was largely championed by a few intellectuals and pundits based in conservative beltway think tanks. As the GOP regrouped in the Obama era, it may find this feminism useful as it softens the culture war crusade that is so off-putting to moderate Republicans and independents alike.

"For such a long time, the powerful women in Washington were all touting pro-choice as pro-woman. People like Sen. Hillary Clinton and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi were the role models," says Emily Buchanan, the young executive director of the Susan B. Anthony List, which seeks to elect pro-life women to office. "[Palin] embodies the American woman. She's independent. She speaks her mind. But she also embodies the traditional values that are so important to Americans."

Another staffer, Justin Aguila, 23, said "There's a great picture of her with her son in a sling signing a law," adding, "My moth-

er is not usually involved in the political process and now she is."

Buchanan agreed, "She's paved the way for traditional women in office. I hope we see our mothers running for office; that they see the connection starting at the community level."

To them, Palin's attraction is that she is "normal," a word heard as often in interviews as "traditional." She wears makeup. She is pretty. She is an evangelical Christian. She is anti-abortion. She is also white.

Palin's campaign reveals a surprising transition in what conservative Christians (including both evangelicals and Roman Catholics) mean by traditional woman: not a stay-at-home mom but someone who believes in a heterosexual nuclear family and conservative "family values." By contrast, "biblical womanhood" is the phrase used by neo-Calvinists and others to describe submissive stay-at-home moms who are expected to ask their husbands how they should vote. During the election, champions of biblical womanhood such as Doug Phillips of the home-schooling ministry Vision Forum opposed Palin's candidacy on the grounds that God did not mean for women to lord over men or depart from being "keepers of the home." Phillips called Palin's selection "the single most dangerous event in the conscience of the Christian community in the last 10 years."

Redefining the traditional to embrace egalitarian working moms builds on larger shifts seen among evangelicals. As W. Bradford Wilcox argues, white evangelical Protestants typically talk right but go left: they want "traditional" families while having the same messy family lives as everyone else, including one of the highest rates of divorce in the country. Evangelicals share the economic challenges facing the rest of the country, where two-income families are a necessity.

Powerful "traditional" women balancing work and domesticity are no big deal, says Joy Yearout, Susan B. Anthony List's legislative and political director. Yearout explains the continued enthusiasm for Palin following the Republicans' defeat. "She doesn't see gender as something that is victimizing. She doesn't see it as a barrier."

This suggestion that progressive feminists peddle victimology is a popular position on the right, particularly with the free-market feminists at the Independent Women's Forum (IWF). The IWF staff do not all identify as feminists, although director Michelle Bernard does so and states there can be such a thing as a "limited-government" or "red-state" feminist.

IWF says it offers a feminist alternative to the progressives at National Organization for Women who exaggerate their victimhood to support big government policies.

IWF champions "limited government, equality under the law, property rights, free markets, strong families, and a powerful and effective national defense and foreign policy." It promotes school choice, conservative women's groups on campuses

and women's issues in the Muslim world. And while O'Beirne, an emerita IWF board member, trashes feminists in general (while saying she always supported equal opportunity in the workplace), others on the right criticize the group for continuing to identify with the women's movement at all. Maybe that's why its staff so vigorously attacks liberal feminists.

"We are in the midst of third-wave feminism," argues IWF Director Bernard. "Young women look at it very differently than Gloria Steinem. Feminism was about women's right to choose the way they want to live." "Equity" or free-market feminists like Christina Hoff Sommers of the American Enterprise Institute support women's equal capacity to men and their right to be treated equally in the workplace and schools, while opposing affirmative action, family-leave laws and other government programs to ensure that this equal treatment happens. Like other conservatives, they see it as up to the individual to compete in the market, no matter what background or resources they bring to bear.

The free market feminism of Bernard, Sommers and some conservative Christians is part of a lineage of right-wing feminism that goes back to the post-suffrage National Woman's Party, which became the home of more privileged women who supported a free market and were vigorously anti-communist.

Such women are entangled in class politics. For them, feminism does not lead to support grander claims for economic justice.

The Sarah Palin phenomenon seems to be enlarging the small crew of free-market feminists. Equal "rules of the game" not substantive equality is the goal.

Their economic vision is in line with both the Heritage Foundation and the Christian Right's Family Research Council in explicitly promoting a free market and "small government" ideology. For free-market Christians, it is important to shrink the government and institute reforms like creating a system of school vouchers so parents can use the money to pay for Christian schools.

This is a position pushed by the new generation of conservative Christian women politicians like Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-Minn.) and Sarah Palin. Both received their political training as conservative pro-life evangelicals, balancing a demanding public life with a large family and merging their family values ideology with market-friendly analysis.

Young conservatives are inspired by Palin's sense of possibility as a liberated woman embracing "traditional" Christian, heterosexual, anti-abortion — and gender egalitarian — values.

Where this new energy takes them is anyone's guess. But with red states lagging in the number of women in elected office, and the GOP's white male complexion now recognized as a problem by some of those white men hoping to win back national power, the free-market feminists might find some support from the top of their party in the coming months.

Abby Scher is a sociologist and editor of The Public Eye. A longer version of this article with footnotes is available at www.publiceye.org.

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Reports from Hell

“EVERYTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE, WE DO NOT HAVE.”

Interview with Palestinian journalist Sameh A. Habeeb by Zahra Hankir of *The Indypendent*, Jan. 4

ZAHRA HANKIR: *What is the current humanitarian situation on the ground in Gaza?*
SAMEH A. HABEEB: If we counted the things that are missing and that we need, we would not finish [this interview]. There is no bread. There is no sugar. There is no gas. There is no fuel. There is no electricity, and there is no wood. There is no cement. Everything you can imagine, we do not have. And this was a problem that started with the blockade and that has accentuated since the attacks began. It was pre-planned. It is not only a matter of a rocket being fired here and there. It is a strategy that Israel has followed.

ZH: *What has been the general attitude of Palestinians in Gaza toward Hamas?*

SAH: The main concern for the Palestinian people now is how to find food, how to light candles, how to keep warm. They do not think much about politics. Generally, support for Hamas is still there, and the decisive battle would be proving whether Hamas will have support or not as it still did not [attack] “hot” areas.

ZH: *What is your current living situation?*

SAH: I live in Gaza City, two kilometers from the Israeli borders. Since the beginning of the blockade, which was imposed 20 months ago, and since the beginning of the war, my life has been turned upside down. There is no gas. No power. No Internet. I charge my laptop by going here and there to get Internet, but generally, there is no fuel, no gasoline, and no oil. In the humanitarian aspect, we do not have anything now. Today I wanted to go to the market to bring home some food. Thank God, I did not go; there was a massacre from artillery shells. Israelis hit the market — the busiest market in Gaza.

Imagine a life with no Internet. No power. No food. Confined to your house with no work. I spend a lot of time on my bed covering myself with blankets because it is so cold. There is no heating. I think. I think. I think.

ZH: *How have you managed to carry on work as a journalist, balancing demands of the job while keeping yourself and your family safe?*

SAH: It is too hazardous to go out whenever I want to. I sometimes go out to take photos, but I’m generally scared to go out because they [the Israelis] restrict all kinds of journalism.

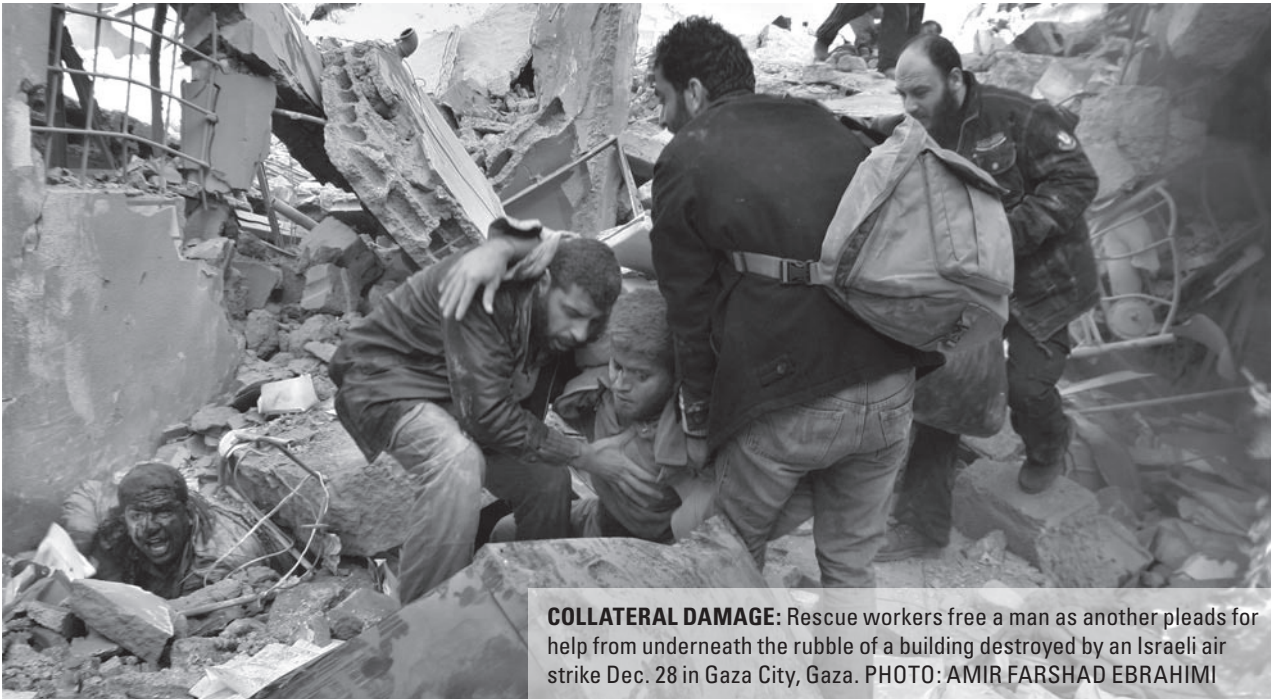
As for the things I do, I have my laptop that I charge from time to time. I visit friends who have power in other areas. I sometimes go some kilometers away to get power.

I charge the laptop and then I call friends to get their news. I have sources in various areas. I call doctors to learn of what is happening in the hospitals. I listen to the radio stations. I have an amalgam of sources, really. And I make sure to write and report them at the end of the day.

Sameh A. Habeeb writes for gazatoday.blogspot.com. For the full interview, see indypendent.org/habeeb-interview.



SAMEH A. HABEEB



COLLATERAL DAMAGE: Rescue workers free a man as another pleads for help from underneath the rubble of a building destroyed by an Israeli air strike Dec. 28 in Gaza City, Gaza. PHOTO: AMIR FARSHAD EBRAHIMI

“WE ARE FOUR AMBULANCES OUT TONIGHT”

By EVA BARTLETT, HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE.

Posted Jan. 2

In the haze of dust and smoke from the latest F-16 strike, a family evacuates its home. The dispatcher at the Jabaliya Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) receives call after call from terrified residents fleeing their homes. It’s a new year, a new Nakba, and an old scene; Israel is bombarding Gaza once again and the world is standing idly by.

We are four ambulances out tonight, versus two last night. The ambulances weave nimbly along blacked-out streets of a manufactured ghost town — like the streets all over Gaza — dodging fresh piles of rubble.

It’s absolutely impossible, unbelievable, it’s a massacre. “They know no limits now,” the medics report. “They are going crazy.”

We pass shells of houses, mosques, schools and shops and see streams of panicked residents fleeing for their lives. Many more began to flee this morning after yet another night of bombardment on and around their houses.

This morning when Israeli planes dropped the flyers announcing their intention to bomb the northern regions in collective punishment, residents believed it. The lights in Jabaliya’s PRCS stations are out, the power has just cut off. In the dark and cold, the sounds of explosions outside are more pronounced.

Acrid smoke from the shelling poisons the air. The feeling of being utterly surrounded by war planes, tanks, bulldozers and warships increases as news comes of the latest attack around Gaza: an orphanage in Gaza City, near the Palestine Mosque, with whispers that the holy place is next, marking at least ten mosques destroyed. The number of dead and injured from the attack on the Ibrahim al-Makadma Mosque today is 11 and 50 respectively, and rising.

A longer version of this article originally appeared on electronicintifada.net. Eva Bartlett is a Canadian human rights advocate who spent eight months in 2007 living in West Bank communities and four months in Cairo and at the Rafah crossing. She has been in Gaza since November.



EVA BARTLETT

“THIS CONFLICT IS ONE OF EXISTENCE”

By RAMI ALMEGHARI, PALESTINIAN REFUGEE.

Posted Jan. 5

My family is from Karatiya village, a few kilometers away from the Gaza Strip in what is now called Israel. Karatiya is one of the 450 towns in historical Palestine that were cleansed by Zionist militias in 1948, displacing my family along with hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians.

I now live in Maghazi refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, which is currently being bombarded by Israel from tanks along the border, American-manufactured F-16s in the sky, and from the sea. Last night Israeli forces invaded the Gaza Strip and heavy fighting is happening in the northern strip and east of Gaza City.

I have just come back to my computer that I’m using when there is electricity. There are electricity cuts here that are very prolonged throughout the day. I manage to use a power generator for my computer when the electricity is out but the generator needs fuel, which is scarce here in Gaza because Israel has closed the border and everything is locked down right now. Shortly I will run out of fuel to run the generator and stay online; this will be devastating because I am a journalist.

... Earlier today I went out into the neighborhood to try to get something from the shop and to talk with some neighbors — really that’s what all people in Gaza are trying to do right now. The main roads in Gaza are almost totally devoid of cars and people. People are staying near their houses and leaving only in the case of an emergency.

I found that my neighbors are dealing very patiently with what is happening right now. They don’t have any place to go and are staying close to their homes, expecting that the worse has yet to come. However, they are saying that they will remain steadfast in their homeland and neighborhood and homes, even if Israel destroys Gaza completely. These people have been refugees for six decades and this conflict is one of existence — the Israelis don’t want the Palestinians to exist and hope they will go to Egypt and Jordan. Refugees recognize this, and they are remaining steadfast in their homeland.

A longer version of this article originally appeared on electronicintifada.net.

Top Three Gaza Myths Debunked

Despite the so-called “liberal” media’s endless barrage of pro-Israeli propaganda, a significant portion of the U.S. public is opposed to the current attack on Gaza. As the casualties mount and peace is pushed further out of reach, *The Independent’s* Jaisal Noor exposes three big myths of the conflict.

By JAISAL NOOR

MYTH #1
The root of the conflict is that Hamas is a terrorist organization bent on the destruction of Israel.

It is true that Hamas commits unjustifiable terrorist acts and is on the United States’ terror list. The “terrorist” label is often used against enemies of U.S.-supported countries. When it was deemed in their interest, Israel and the United States bolstered both Hamas and its predecessor the Muslim Brotherhood. Terrorist tactics were also used by the groups Irgun and the Stern Gang to aid in the creation of a Jewish state. Meanwhile, Israel stands accused of indiscriminately targeting civilians by the United Nations and human rights groups.

The “terror” list currently includes the Lebanese Hezbollah which was born from the resistance to the 1982 Israeli invasion, and until last year included Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress.

Another former member of the U.S. terror list is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The original PLO charter concurs with the Hamas charter, proclaiming that armed struggle be used to reclaim Palestine. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon once accused former PLO leader Yasser Arafat of being a “terrorist,” and refused to negotiate with him. Today the PLO’s biggest party, Fatah, is the preferred peace partner.

Recently, Hamas has firmly maintained that it is now willing to participate in negotiations based on internationally recognized borders and rights. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reports that as early as 2006, Hamas leader Ismaeil Haniyeh offered “a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders and ... a truce for many years.” Haniyeh called on President Bush to launch a dialogue with the Hamas government. “We are not warmongers, we are peacemakers and we call on the American government to have

direct negotiations with the elected government.” Hamas re-emphasized this position recently, adding, “our conflict is not with the Jews, our problem is with the occupation.” The United States and Israel ignored the offer.

Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank — which were occupied by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War — are recognized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 as the land for a future Palestinian state. This has become the international consensus for peace, with only Israel, the United States and a handful of other nations voting against the annual General Assembly resolution calling for a settlement based on “242.”

MYTH #2
Hamas is to blame for ending the cease-fire and Israel’s actions are in self-defense.

The three conditions for the June 2008 ceasefire were that (1) Israel would drastically reduce its military blockade of Gaza, (2) Israel would halt all military incursions into Gaza and, (3) Hamas would halt all rocket attacks into Israel.

From the outset of the cease-fire, Israel did little to ease its military blockade. As a result, Gazans continued to suffer from a lack of food, fuel, financial aid, electricity, clean water, medical supplies and more. The United Nations warned that Gaza would face “catastrophe” if the blockade were not lifted. The Israeli government maintained that the blockade was necessary to stop rocket attacks. However, as the Canadian *Globe and Mail* newspaper reports, Hamas had ceased launching rockets into Israel during the cease-fire and even arrested members of militant groups who did fire a handful of rockets.

Despite the intense blockade against Gazan civilians, the cease-fire held until Nov. 4. On that date, *Haaretz* reports, it was the Israeli military that made an incursion into Gaza and killed six Palestinians. The Israeli government sought to justify these actions, saying that these Palestinians were suspected of plotting to kidnap Israeli soldiers. Predictably, militants responded to the attack by launching rockets into Israel. Thus began the unraveling of the cease-fire.

Following the end of the cease-fire, Israel moved closer to an invasion, claiming this

was the only remaining option to eliminate rocket attacks from Gaza. According to *Haaretz*, Hamas offered to extend the ceasefire if Israel lifted its blockade. There is evidence that Israel was planning to strike Gaza before and during the cease-fire.

The White House said that Israel will cease its attack when Hamas has agreed to a truce. Hamas has said it would abide by a cease-fire if border crossings were reopened and the economic siege of Gaza ended. Israel has refused this offer.

Meanwhile, Israel unleashed its U.S.-supplied arsenal — which includes unconventional weapons — while attacking its own designated safe-areas. This forced the Red Cross and United Nations to briefly suspend relief work in Gaza, spurring the Vatican to compare the conditions there to a “concentration camp.” The United States abstained from a Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire.

MYTH #3
Israel and the United States are doing everything in their power to achieve peace.

For decades the United States has provided Israel with billions of dollars annually in military aid and backed Israel’s seizure of occupied lands. The number of settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem has increased from 200,000 in 1990 to an estimated 450,000 today. Claiming it received secret U.S. approval, Israel announced it would build thousands of new homes in 2008. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that this directly “contravenes both international law and Israel’s obligations” in the peace process.

Israel has also erected a “security barrier” through the West Bank, annexing large swaths of land. In 2004, the International Court of Justice declared construction of the wall “contrary to international law.”

Meanwhile, even outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has recently stated that to achieve peace and recognition by the Arab world, Israel “should withdraw from almost all of the territories, including in East Jerusalem and in the Golan Heights.”

Amid reports that President-elect Obama may reverse U.S. policy and negotiate with Hamas, scholar Norman Finkelstein observes, “Hamas in recent months has supported a two-state settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict, joining the international

consensus. It’s abiding by the terms of the truce, showing it can be trusted to abide by its agreements, which means it was becoming a credible negotiating partner.” He adds, “Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni stated in early December 2008 that although Israel wanted to create a temporary period of calm with Hamas, an extended truce ‘harms the Israeli strategic goal, empowers Hamas, and gives the impression that Israel recognizes the movement.’ Translation: a protracted cease-fire that enhanced Hamas’ credibility would have undermined Israel’s strategic goal of retaining control of the West Bank.” Finkelstein concludes: “Israel was facing a new Palestinian peace offensive and therefore it has to knock out Hamas.”

Adam Sheets contributed to this article.



THE WORLD STANDS WITH PALESTINE:
Pro-Palestinian women in New York City stand next to the Palestinian flag at one of the many demonstrations that have taken place since the Israeli assault on Gaza began in late December. From New York to London to Cairo, hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets. “We are demanding that the Palestinians be protected, but as Americans, we are also demanding that our tax money not be spent on killing innocent civilians,” a protestor told *The Independent* at a Jan. 3 rally in New York City. PHOTO: MARK A. BAILEY

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BRECHT FORUM

THURSDAY, JAN 29, 6 - 9 PM
Black History Exhibit Opens

MONDAY FEB 2, 5:30 - 7:30 PM
6-session class begins

MONDAY FEB 2, 5:30 - 7:30 PM
4-day intensive for activist youth begins

MONDAY FEB 2, 7:30 - 9:30 PM
Workshop & study group: part ii- 12 sessions

TUESDAY FEB 3, 5:30 - 7:30 PM
8-session class begins

TUES FEB 3, 7:30 PM
6-session class begins

OUR FLESH IN FLAMES
Work by Theodore A. Harris and Amiri Baraka

THE GRUNDRISSE,
Bill DiFazio

BLACK RESISTANCE HISTORY
Facilitated by Sam Anderson

REVOLUTIONS OUR HERITAGE & PROSPECTS FOR OUR TIME
Michael Lardner with Others TBA

CAPITALISM'S CRISIS: A MARXIAN ANALYSIS
Richard Wolff

CONSENSUS MECHANICS: DECISION-MAKING AS CHANGE
Autumn Brown

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THE BRECHT FORUM

THE INDEPENDENT JANUARY 16 - FEBRUARY 5, 2009 15

NUCLEAR WASTE DUMPING, FISH POACHING AND U.S.-BACKED PROXY WAR DRIVE COASTAL CRISIS

By JOSEPH HUFF-HANNON

Somalia's status as the global epicenter of piracy seemed verified when, on Jan. 9, the U.S. Navy released a photo of a container, apparently holding some \$3 million in ransom money, being parachuted onto a hijacked Saudi supertanker full of crude oil in East African waters.

The ship was one of 42 vessels captured last year off Somalia's coast by modern-day pirates who have traded spyglasses for GPS technology and treasure chests for international wire transfers. Observers attribute the proliferation of seafaring bandits to the onshore strife in Somalia, which has lacked a functioning central government since 1991.

"Piracy is a problem that starts on the shore," said U.S. Navy Cmdr. Jane Campbell of the Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet to reporters. "The international community needs to address the situation on the ground in Somalia."

What Campbell neglected to mention is that the anarchy in Somalia has U.S. fingerprints all over it. Somalia is one of the most underreported fronts in the outgoing Bush administration's "global war on terror," and piracy is one of its unintended consequences.

While blowback in the Horn of Africa may be occurring on the high seas, its origins are to be found inland. In December 2006, the United States provided diplomatic cover and military training for an Ethiopian invasion force that ousted the Islamic movement known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which had come to administer the capital and much of the south of the country.

Two years on, the invasion and ensuing war has not only failed to secure U.S. and Ethiopian interests, it has resulted in a humanitarian disaster. Now Ethiopia is pulling out its troops, the U.S. and Ethiopian-backed Transitional Federal Government is near collapse, and President Abdullahi Yusuf, a longtime ally of Ethiopia, has resigned.

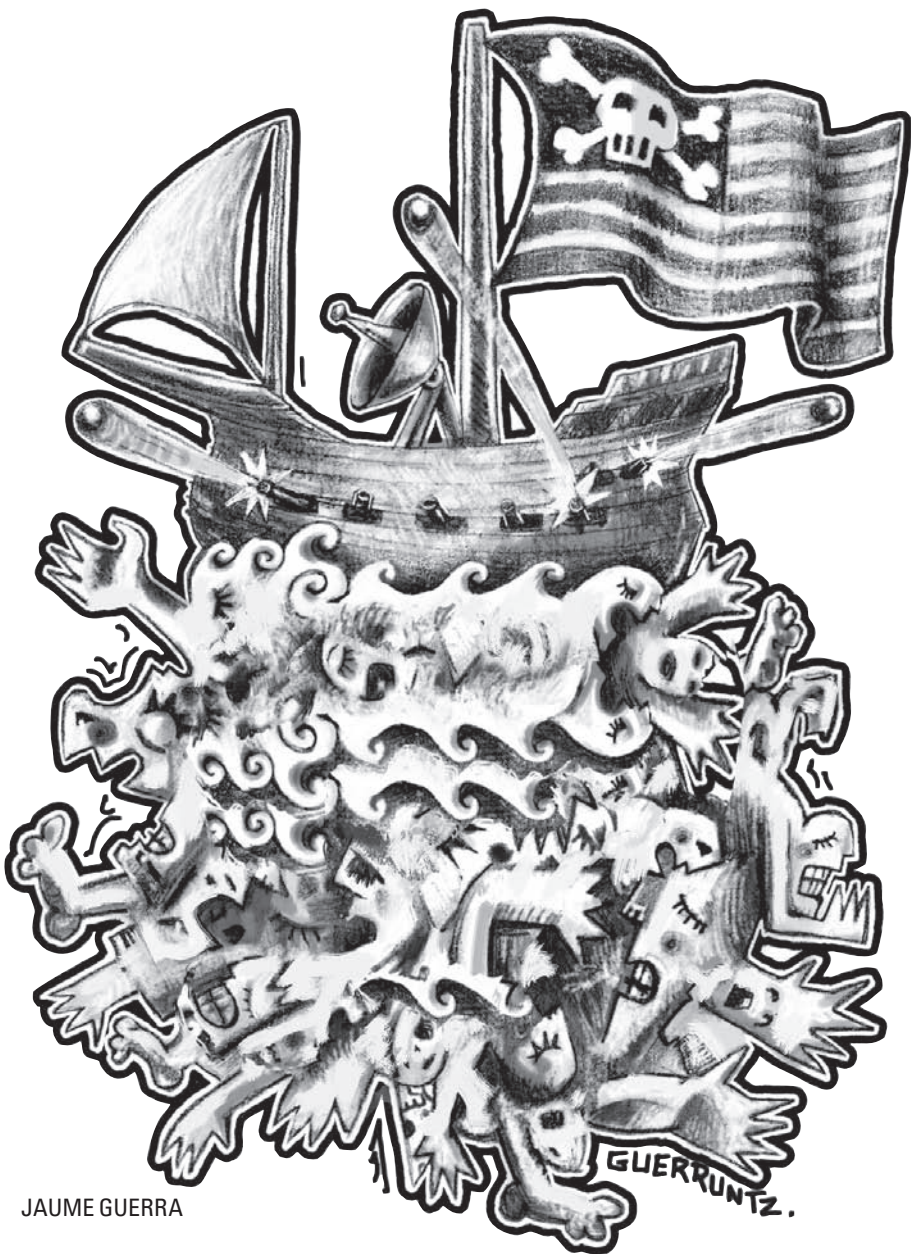
On the brink of controlling Somalia are the Islamist and anti-occupation Al Shabaab movement ("Party of the Youth"). More radical than the ICU, which was credited by many Somalis with restoring basic services and security, the Al Shabaab movement has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

In this lawless environment, piracy has flourished. While the media have fixated on the threat to commercial shipping in the Gulf of Aden, they have largely ignored other types of pirates that are plundering and despoiling Somalia's waters.

With a 2,000-mile coastline, the longest on the African continent, Somalia is unable to stop the "700 foreign-owned vessels that are fully engaged in unlicensed fishing" in its waters, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. Additionally, states the U.N. outfit, "there is also strong suspicion of illegal dumping of industrial and nuclear wastes along the Somali coast."

Some Somali pirates claim they are acting as "coast guards" to protect Somalia's waters from illegal fishing and waste dumping. In fact, a number of fishing vessels seized and ransomed have been from countries that are implicated in the illegal fishing, such as Spain.

In turn, the lack of security has become a business opportunity, as a dozen mercenary companies are providing security to commercial shippers, according to Bloomberg News.



JAUME GUERRA

Pirates and Mercenaries and Islamists, Oh My!

Some nations may even prefer that mercenaries handle the pirates, rather than negotiating security agreements that would demand a higher level of transparency. "Some of the countries most active in the anti-piracy attempts are also countries with large economic interests in Somali waters," says Gustavo Carvalho, a researcher with the London-based Global Witness who estimates that \$300 million worth of fish are poached from Somali waters each year.

'CATASTROPHIC'

The International Committee of the Red Cross calls the current situation in Somalia "catastrophic." At least 10,000 civilians have been killed in two years of fighting. The United Nations says that up to 3.5 million people, or nearly half the country's population, will soon need food aid to avoid starvation. And up to a million and a half people have been made internal refugees, living in sprawling tent cities outside of Mogadishu.

The capital itself is largely destroyed and abandoned. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented extensive war crimes committed by Ethiopian troops, soldiers loyal to the Transitional Federal Government and Islamic rebels. And without the estimated \$1 billion Somalis working abroad send back annually, the cash economy would probably collapse.

"Everybody is so concentrated on piracy on the water, but it's totally overshadowing the humanitarian disaster on the land," says Sadia Ali Aden, co-founder of the Somali Diaspora Network. "Under the cloud of piracy, Ethiopian troops are still in So-

malia, killing with impunity."

Piracy largely came to a halt in 2006 when the Islamic Courts Union administered much of Somalia. Michael Shank, a senior analyst for *Foreign Policy in Focus*, writes that after the ICU took power in 2006, "the airport opened after 11 years of closure, shipping ports and seaports were secured to ensure safe transport of food and products, law and order returned to Mogadishu, education and health care remained a top priority, environmental regulations were instituted ... and crime diminished significantly."

The ICU was supported by a Somali business community weary of the checkpoints and shakedowns carried out by warlords, many of whom were on the CIA payroll. After highly publicized — but unsubstantiated — accusations against the ICU, including alleged ties to Al Qaeda members linked to the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, Ethiopia invaded on Christmas Eve, 2006. U.S. backing was reportedly extensive and included training exercises held with the Ethiopian army at Camp Lemonier in neighboring Djibouti.

For the United States, this is a war fought on the cheap, largely through Ethiopia, CIA-funded warlords and the occasional missile strike on "suspected terrorists." After one U.S. strike in May 2008 killed a well-known Islamist militia leader, as well as up to a dozen civilians, retaliatory attacks were levied against African Union peacekeeping troops, further destabilizing the country just before U.N.-sponsored peace talks were to begin.

MAKING WAR, MAKING MONEY

"Everybody is fascinated with the piracy, but these are not the Robin Hoods of the sea," says Hassan Warsame, co-founder at the Somali Diaspora Network. "They're not taking these millions and giving them to the poor of Mogadishu. A lot of these guys were involved in other forms of crime before," Warsame claims.

According to the Independent (U.K.), the original pirates were Somali fishermen who took to "speedboats to try to dissuade the dumpers and trawlers, or at least levy a 'tax' on them."

"There are reports from villagers of a wide range of medical problems like mouth bleeds, abdominal hemorrhages, unusual skin disorders and breathing difficulties," said Nick Nuttall, a spokesman for the United Nations Environment Program, to *Voice of America*.

In December 2004, the deadly Boxing Day tsunami washed hundreds of broken barrels of radioactive waste onto Somali shores, leading to more than 300 deaths.

Amid the chaos, mercenary companies like Blackwater Worldwide and Mississippi-based Hollowpoint are looking to make some loot. Peter Singer, author of *Corporate Warriors*, recently referred to Africa as "a potential growth market" for mercenaries. The U.S. Navy concurred. A spokesperson for the Fifth Fleet called the arrival of private military contractors to the region, "a great trend." But not everyone agrees.

"People forget the history of private military contractors, that it was actually in Africa where they first got really big — during apartheid and South Africa's proxy wars in Angola and Mozambique," says Roxanne Lawson, Africa Policy Director for the Washington, D.C.-based TransAfrica Forum, a human rights and policy organization. The contractors, says Lawson, "know the American public is suffering from invasion fatigue. So the question is what's the next big market? Is it proxy wars? Or is it battling pirates?"

ETHIOPIA'S ROLE

Hardly a bastion of democracy, Ethiopia has close ties to Washington and secures hundreds of millions in U.S. aid every year, much of it military. In 2005, hundreds of Ethiopian civilians were gunned down by government troops in the capital of Addis Ababa following protests around a suspect election that kept Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's party in power. And Human Rights Watch has documented many recent cases in which Ethiopian troops have engaged in executions, massacres, rape and torture, as well as burning entire villages in the Ogaden, a region with an active separatist movement that borders Somalia.

When Ethiopian tanks entered Mogadishu in December 2006, many of the warlords ousted by the ICU, some of the same men involved in the fighting against U.S. marines in 1993, returned. Those allegedly responsible for the Kenya bombings have never been apprehended. As Ethiopian troops now depart, those who will likely take power in Somalia are much more radical than their elders in the ICU who were targeted by U.S. missiles, or kidnapped and sent to Ethiopian jails.

Perhaps it takes a vast new economy of banditry on the high seas to call attention to the fact that U.S. foreign policy towards Somalia is yet another example of the failure of a never-ending "war on terror." Whether the new administration takes a different approach is an open question.

Bolivia: A Model for Change

By Benjamin Dangl

After months of street battles and political meetings, the Bolivian congress ratified a new draft of its constitution last Oct. 21. A national referendum on whether or not to make the document official is scheduled for Jan. 25. “Now we have made history,” President Evo Morales told supporters in La Paz. “This process of change cannot be turned back. ... Neoliberalism will never return to Bolivia.” If the constitution is approved in the January referendum, a new general election will take place in December 2009. The upcoming referendum comes just days after another major event in the hemisphere: Barack Obama’s inauguration as U.S. president on Jan. 20. The proximity of these two events offering “change” is a great opportunity to reflect on what change has meant for many Bolivians under Morales, and the role of Bolivia’s social movements in moving the country in new directions.

BIRTH OF A NEW NATION

Bolivia’s social movements have been a driving force in that country’s transformation throughout the past eight years.

April 2000—The people of Cochabamba, a city of 900,000 in central Bolivia, launch a general strike and shut the city down to protest the privatization of the city’s water system by a price-gouging subsidiary of the U.S.-based Bechtel Corporation. Weeks of protest end when the Bolivian government announces that it will return the water system to public control.

September-October 2003—Nationwide demonstrations and road blockades bring the country to a standstill for a month to protest government plans to hand over Bolivia’s vast natural gas reserves to foreign investors. Army and police forces kill nearly 80 protesters before President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada is forced to flee the country when public opinion turns decisively against him.

June 2005—Sanchez de Lozada’s successor Carlos Mesa is forced to resign amid renewed protests calling for the full nationalization of Bolivia’s natural gas reserves. A new presidential election is set for later in the year.

December 2005—Evo Morales of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) wins the presidency in an electoral landslide.

May 1, 2006—Morales partially nationalizes foreign oil and natural gas holdings and gains a substantial increase in royalties from foreign companies.

July 2006–December 2007—Bolivians vote for a constituent assembly, which proceeds to write a new constitution over the next 18 months.

August 2008—Morales wins 67 percent of the vote in a recall referendum initiated by his conservative foes.

October 2008—After months of protests led by labor, peasant and student organizations, Bolivia’s congress passes legislation allowing the new draft constitution to go to a popular vote in January 2009.

—JOHN TARLETON

Sources: IPS, IRC Americas Program, upsidedownworld.com, mundoandino.com.

Evo Morales, an indigenous former coca grower organizer, was elected president of Bolivia in December 2005 on a platform that included nationalizing gas reserves, redistributing land, re-writing the constitution and granting increased rights to disenfranchised indigenous groups around the country. In varying degrees, he followed through on many of these promises. The nationalized gas and oil industry has brought in \$1.5 billion in revenue to the impoverished government, significant areas of unused land have been given to landless farmers, and indigenous rights are a key theme in the new constitution.

Leading up to the congress approval of the constitution and referendum plans in October, Morales participated in sections of a march of more than 100 miles from Caracollo in Oruro to La Paz that involved an estimated 100,000 union members, activists, students, farmers and miners. The march was intended to pressure opposition members of congress to back the constitution and referendum. When participants arrived in the capital they packed the city center in historic numbers. Some media outlets said the march, which stretched nine miles, was the longest ever in the capital. The lead-up in the streets to the congressional vote was characteristic of the way popular mobilizations have helped push through major political decisions and laws.

Nationwide mobilizations in 2003 paved the way for the partial nationalization of Bolivian gas reserves in 2006. In November 2006 changes to a land reform bill were passed thanks to massive pressure from landless farmers, unions and activists. And the rewritten constitution itself is in part the product of months of protests, strikes and heated discussions inside and outside the halls of the government.

Throughout Morales’ time in office, numerous rallies, marches and strikes have given the administration the ongoing mandate it needed to confront the Bolivian right wing. Activists in the United States who want to pressure the Obama administration for radical changes could learn a great deal from the Bolivian grassroots movements.

A NEW CONSTITUTION

The road to this new constitution has been a long, complicated and often violent one. One key event was the July 2, 2006, election of a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. Later in December 2007, the new constitution was passed in an assembly meeting that opposition members boycotted. In many ways, these various steps will culminate in the Jan. 25 referendum.

Given Morales’ support across the country, the new constitution is expected to be passed. “The public support expressed for [Morales] ... coming on top of the 67 percent vote of confidence he was given in the Aug. 10 recall referendum, make it clear that he is the most popular president in the last 26 years of democracy in Bolivia,” Franz Chavez reported in IPS News.

The draft constitution includes changes to allow the nationalization and redistribution of natural resources to benefit the majority of the country. It establishes the Bolivian state as plurinational, as to reflect the diversity of indigenous and Afro-Bolivian groups in the country. It formally promotes the official use of the country’s 36 indigenous languages. The new constitution also grants autonomy to indigenous groups across the nation, enabling them to govern their own communities.



A PEOPLE ON THE MOVE: Hundreds of thousands of Bolivians rally in La Paz to support a proposed constitution that would enshrine sweeping social reforms. A nationwide referendum on the new constitution will be held Jan. 25. PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/GAFFERBEE

Most of Bolivia’s fertile land is in the hands of a few wealthy landowners, and the revised constitution may fall short of the extensive land reform called for by Bolivian social movements. The new constitution puts a size limit only on land recently acquired or land considered by the government to be socially and economically productive. The cap — from 5,000 to 10,000 hectares — will be voted on later. Therefore, it’s possible that many of the enormous land holdings of the Bolivian elite, particularly in the eastern part of the country, won’t be redistributed under the current constitution.

In another concession to the opposition, the draft constitution was changed to prevent Morales from running for two additional terms, as an earlier draft of the constitution allowed. If the constitution is approved, Morales would run for his last consecutive term in general elections in December of 2009. This move indicates that the Movement Toward Socialism, Morales’ political party, may have plans to diversify its central leadership.

Morales commented on these changes in a speech in La Paz, “here we have new leaders who are rising up, new men and women leaders who are coming up like mushrooms to continue this process of change.”

It remains to be seen how social movements that are disenchanted with the new constitution — particularly on issues of

land distribution and autonomy for states controlled by the right — will react. If recent events are any indication, significant hope lies in the potential of Bolivia’s grassroots to radicalize the Morales government.

Benjamin Dangl is the author of The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia (AK Press.) He is the editor of towardfreedom.com, a progressive perspective on world events, and upsidedownworld.org, a website on activism and politics in Latin America.



WEB EXCLUSIVE: For more on the Latin American Left and Obama, see Daniel Denvir’s coverage at indydependent.org.

Ecuador Roars

Three months after Ecuadorians approved a new progressive constitution, the nation’s largest federation of indigenous groups launched road blockades across southern Ecuador and the Amazon region Jan. 7 to protest President Rafael Correa’s proposed mining law. A nationwide mobilization was announced for Jan. 20.

According to the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the government is describing protesters as “criminals and subversive terrorists,” in an effort “to stigmatize [protesters] and prepare public opinion for even more severe repression.”

The new mining law would allow for large-scale open pit metal mining. Correa hopes increased revenues from mining will help pay for ambitious social welfare programs mandated by the new constitution. However, peasant and indigenous leaders warn that expanded metal mining will contaminate the supplies of clean water they depend on. They also note that the mining law would violate a provision of Ecuador’s constitution which guarantees nature’s “right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution” and mandates that the government take “precaution and restriction measures in all the activities that can lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of the ecosystems or the permanent alteration of the natural cycles.”

—COMPILED FROM UPSIDEDOWNWORLD.ORG.

The Only Game In Town

The Democrats: A Critical History
By LANCE SELFA
HAYMARKET BOOKS, 2008.



The countdown to George W. Bush’s final day in office put a smile on most progressive faces. As Jan. 20 rolls around, it’s hard to resist the urge to cheer the departure of one of the world’s chief warmongers. But will Barack Obama’s ascension mean anything beyond the symbolic, or will it be business-as-usual, at the behest of a more articulate, more likeable, head of state?

Lance Selfa has crafted a smart, readable history of the Democrats that reminds us of the party’s allegiance to capital. Despite forward-leaning spurts — the New Deal, the War on Poverty and the creation of programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security and unemployment insurance — time and again we’ve seen Democrats capitulate on issues that matter, whether supporting militarism or slashing spending for human needs. “These Democratic betrayals are not primarily the result of unscrupulous politicians or office holders who sell out,” Selfa writes. “Rather, they are the inevitable outcome of a political institution that socialists have long described as a capitalist party that only pretends to be a friend of working people.”

The Democrats is at its best not just when analyzing Democratic foibles — and there are plenty — but when assessing how the party stifles dissent. Take trade unions. Selfa harkens back to the 1930s when militant strikes and on-the-ground activism swelled organized labor’s ranks from 2.7 million in 1933 to seven million four years later. “A remade Democratic Party was the vehicle Roosevelt used to absorb the rising labor movement within the

Rethinking the Rise of Obama

Barack Obama and Future of American Politics
By PAUL STREET
PARADIGM PUBLISHERS, 2009

The Democratic Party’s progressive base has been repeatedly disappointed in recent decades by the triangulating, pro-corporate tilt of the party’s Washington-based establishment. Will things be different this time under President Barack Obama?

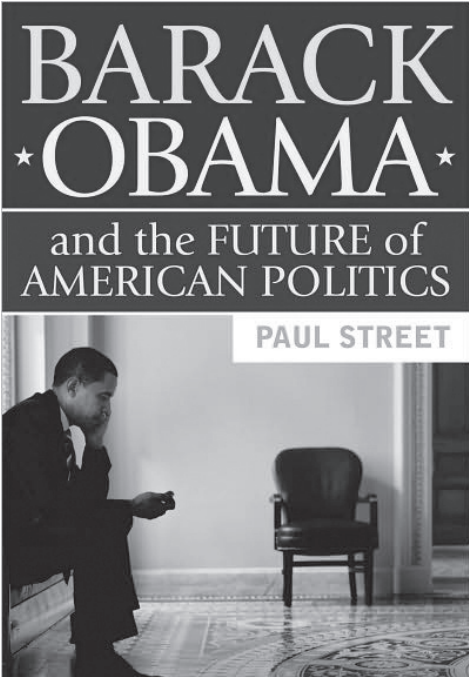
Not likely, says political analyst Paul Street in *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*, a reality based examination of Obama’s rise to prominence. This book should be of interest to anyone looking for a deeper understanding of how Obama got where he is and what sort of “change” he has in mind.

Street watched Obama’s ascent from up close — first as a researcher and policy analyst at the Chicago Urban League and later in Iowa as a volunteer for John Edwards’ campaign in the run-up to that state’s all-important presidential caucuses. His book lacks the insider access that informs many political biographies, but more than makes up for that with a relentless focus on the issues.

Street doesn’t dwell on Bill Ayers, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, “bittergate,” unworn flag pins and the many other distractions that passed for media coverage during the presidential campaign.

Instead, Street draws from both Obama’s public statements and press coverage and frames it within an anti-corporate critique of the socio-economic and political forces that drove Obama’s candidacy. In doing so, he peels away Obama’s vague rhetoric to connect the dots. The portrait that emerges is one of a nimble, well-marketed politician who is able to inspire progressives while reassuring economic and political elites.

One of the most revealing parts of the book is Street’s recounting of the “political and business class tryout” that began for Obama in the fall of 2003. Gearing up to run for an open U.S. Senate seat representing Illinois, Obama quickly dazzled key players from the Democratic Party’s financial, legal and lobbyist sectors with his charm, his Harvard Law Review credentials and his “reasonableness”



on the issues.

This audition would continue once Obama arrived in Congress. Eager to prove his pro-business credentials to potential big-money donors, Sen. Obama voted in favor of punitive bankruptcy legislation and Republican-led efforts to remove class-action lawsuits from state courts. He also demonstrated his “seriousness” on national security issues by embracing Connecticut’s blowhard senator Joseph Lieberman as a “mentor” and campaigning for him in 2006 when he faced a tough primary challenge from the antiwar left.

The longest chapter in the book looks at Obama’s careful dance with race. For Street, Obama is the black politician white America has been waiting for — charismatic but never angry, conciliatory not polarizing. His tacit arrangement with white voters — he refuses to talk about the structural racism that is still prevalent in American society while they will overlook his blackness — could end being quite costly for many African-Americans.

Despite all evidence to the contrary, many

on the left cling to the belief that Obama is one of them. He is cleverly waiting for the right moment to show his true commitments, the argument goes. Taking aim at this mentality, Street reminds readers to look at politicians like Obama in a structural context:

“Many, if not most, of those candidates and officials ... have likely internalized the authoritarian values of corporation capitalism, socioeconomic equality, U.S. nationalism and imperial globalism. The deeper point, however, is that it might not matter what sort of internal values they may or may not hold, since they are trying to succeed within a political culture and system that tends to mitigate against progressive commitments.”

In the end, Street’s story of Obama is one of the tension between the promise of democracy and the harsh realities of class rule. If Street’s take on Obama is unsympathetic, his real target is the corporate-dominated political system that requires all “serious” presidential aspirants to operate within narrow ideological parameters that take progressive concerns off the table. Instead, Street argues, we are treated to an electoral spectacle every four years that is not worthy of the trust people put in it.

If this all sounds too depressing, Street also posits reasons to not just be relieved that the Republicans have been removed from power but hopeful about what may come next. Obama, after all, is an astute politician and will move as the political climate changes. He won’t do the left’s work for it. But if the millions of people he inspired to care about politics continue to organize and push from the grassroots, new possibilities will open up.

As Street notes near the end of the book, “Democracy’s true source lies not in candidates and officeholders but in aroused and organized citizens who promote, push and punish politicians and public officials. Obama, a militant ‘realist’ and master of the ‘winnable,’ is no magical exception.”

—JOHN TARLETON

For The Independent’s *interview with Paul Street*, go to independent.org/Paul_Street.

.....

confines of the existing political establishment,” Selfa continues. “By supporting the creation of Social Security and passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, Roosevelt laid the groundwork for capturing the labor movement vote for the Democrats in 1936 and beyond.”

What’s more, labor leaders itching to enter the halls of power willingly sacrificed bellicosity and allowed themselves and their organizations to be co-opted. Labor honchos willingly agreed to no-strike pledges during World War II, and by the 1950s they lined up

to sign anti-communist loyalty oaths. Indeed, for upwards of 60 years, organized labor has consistently championed Democratic politicians while rarely if ever challenging the status quo.

So what’s to be done? While it’s easy to conclude that the lesser of two evils is still evil, third-party efforts have repeatedly floundered, and despite Selfa’s plea for socialist alternatives to Republicrat rule, such alternatives have failed to materialize. Yes, Eugene Debs, Robert LaFollette and Ralph Nader won millions of votes when they ran — but they still lost.

Selfa criticizes efforts to change the Democratic Party from within — efforts promoted by the Democratic Socialists of America and Progressive Democrats of America — arguing that “the party of the World Bank, the CIA and the Vietnam War” will never allow substantive changes.

If he’s right, this leaves us in a quandary, since the revolutionary change he advocates seems like a pipe dream. While realism may reflect a failure of imagination, for the time being pushing the Democratic Party to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and fund

social programs seem like sound priorities.

After all, the first tenet of community organizing is to start where people congregate and agitate around their concerns. In 2009, these issues are militarism, the economy and the need for universal healthcare. And the place? Until we organize a party that reflects the interests of the poor and working classes, the Democrats are who’s there.

—ELEANOR J. BADER

Fun with Dick and Che

Frost/Nixon
DIRECTED BY RON HOWARD
IMAGINE ENTERTAINMENT ET AL.

Che Parts 1 and 2
DIRECTED BY STEVEN SODERBERGH
TELECINCO CINEMA, ET AL.

Fun? Yes, but not quite with either former President Richard Milhous Nixon or Marxist revolutionary icon Ernesto “Che” Guevara in the two current movies carrying their names. Both films, however, are well worth seeing.

Frost/Nixon is lots of fun — just not with the former president, who’s nowhere in evidence. There is a man called Richard Nixon (played by distinguished stage and screen veteran Frank Langella), and British television personality and talk-show host David Frost (Michael Sheen) is trying to revive his flagging career by securing an interview with the former president three years after he resigned under a cloud of impeachment.

The real Frost did indeed interview the real Nixon, but Frost/Nixon has less to do with history than with Hollywood. It’s a David-and-Goliath tale in the best movie tradition, dressed in the clothes and names of real people. Richard Nixon may have been the most charmless politician in U.S. history — and as fine an actor as Langella is, he can’t quite turn off the charisma. He makes Nixon more attractive than he was, while the screenplay makes him rather more ethical, and both Sheen and the screenplay portray Frost as an intellectual, moral and political lightweight. Instead of being a villain, Langella’s Nixon becomes Frost’s worthy opponent, a doomed but almost noble figure with little in common with the man he’s portraying.

See it anyway — if you can ignore the inaccuracies, it’s a crackling good story of the search for truth vs. the business of entertainment, with fine performances by Kevin Bacon, Sam Rockwell and Oliver Platt as, respectively, Nixon aide Jack Brennan and Frost colleagues James Reston Jr. and Bob Zelnick.

No one will ever describe Che as a crackling good story. Drawn from



Guevara’s own works, Steven Soderbergh’s reverent, two-part, four-hour-plus account of Guevara’s major role in the Cuban revolution and his doomed attempt to replicate that revolution in Bolivia is documentary in tone and glacial in pace.

Part 1, based on Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War, begins with the fateful 1955 Mexico City meeting between Fidel Castro (Demian Bechir) and the young Argentine doctor Ernesto Guevara (Benicio Del Toro) (known as “Che” for his habit of calling almost everyone by that Argentine equivalent of “dude”). Castro was seeking support for his July 26 Movement to oust Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista; Guevara was seeking a home for his revolutionary dreams. The next year they sailed with 80 troops to Cuba, where they launched a military campaign in the Sierra Maestra mountains. Most of Part 1 relates that campaign, including the strategic coups that led to Guevara’s promotion to comandante and culminating in the revolutionary forces’ decisive 1958 victory at the eastern Cuban city of Santa Clara.

Part 2 skips ahead to 1964 and a series of pro-Cuban speeches Guevara made in New York City, after which he essentially disappeared from public view. He had in fact gone to the Congo to support guerrillas there — an episode omitted from the movie — but left Africa and traveled clandestinely to Bolivia to help bring about a Cuban-style revolution there. Bolivia was not Cuba, however — for one thing, the Bolivian left failed to support

Guevara’s campaign, and, perhaps more disastrously, the CIA was present in force to prevent revolution. The campaign failed, and in October 1967 Guevara was captured by CIA and Bolivian Army forces and executed by the Bolivians. Guevara told that story in his posthumously published Bolivian Diary, on which Soderbergh based Part 2.

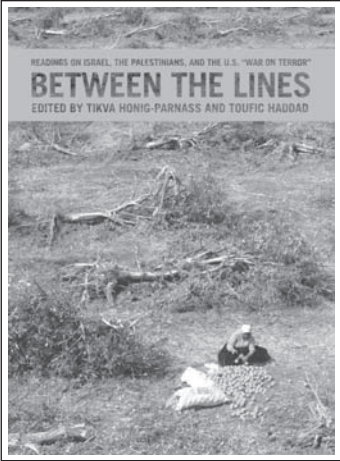
More historically accurate than Frost/Nixon by an order of magnitude, Che nevertheless contains several serious omissions. The film focuses almost entirely on Che the soldier and military strategist at the expense of Che the revolutionary theorist and intellectual. Also, perhaps because of Soderbergh’s uncritical reliance on Che’s own works (and despite Del Toro’s intense performance and almost non-stop on-screen presence), Che the character remains elusive, more monumental than human. By ending the Cuban narrative in 1959, Soderbergh avoids confronting Che’s role in the campaign of “revolutionary justice” that followed, dealing out death sentences to scores (if not hundreds) of Batista followers and counter-revolutionaries. The movie also hints at Guevara’s reputation as a fierce disciplinarian in the field but skirts any explicit depiction of it.

All in all, Che is a better history of two revolutionary efforts than of one man at their center, but certainly valuable for all those who never learned that history, or enjoy reliving at least the victorious parts of it. Frost/Nixon isn’t history at all, but not a bad afternoon at the movies.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK



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—Noam Chomsky



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